University of Alberta

Second Language, Intercultural Experience, and Identity: A Case Study of Korean Overseas Students in Canada

by

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Canada

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between studying abroad experience and identity through the lived experiences of Korean overseas students who have studied in Canada. The issue is approached from sociocultural and critical perspectives of language learning and identity. This study was an intensive exploration of a limited number of personal cases. It concerned the nature and significance of four Korean overseas students' studying abroad experiences and how the experiences have interacted with the individual's identity de/re/construction process. Through informal and open-ended conversational interviews, this qualitative study examined major characteristics of their intercultural/linguistic experiences and how their identities have been de/re/constructed across cultural and linguistic settings and over time. Also, the study explored affective, socio-cultural, historical, religious factors associated with their changing understanding and practices of identities before and during cross-cultural /linguistic contact.

Conversations with each participant were reconstructed into four narratives. Then Common themes were extracted from the narratives and discussed under the two categories: (1) Identity Formation/ Background in Korea and (2) Identity De/Re/ Construction in Canada.

Common themes in Identity Formation/ Background in Korea include, (a) Academic/ social success as a key basis of identity; (b) English/ studying abroad as a key means to social/ academic success; (c) Admiration for the West: Cultural hegemony: Each participant's motivation for coming to Canada shared some

common beliefs or anticipations: All participants believed that studying abroad/ English would provide them with better opportunities for academic or career success, which was the key basis of their perception or understanding of self-identity in Korea. From this perspective, each participant's motivation for studying abroad/ English learning could be seen as their efforts to seek "a better self and future", as one of participants expressed in one interview. This was evidently imbued with their admiration for the West, which was nurtured through the media or parents in their upbringings.

Common themes in Identity De/Re/ Construction in Canada include, (a) English and identity struggles; (b) Desire for belonging; (c) Frozen futurism; (d) Spirituality and Identity reconstruction: However, the participants' experiences in Canada show that their perception of linguistically/ culturally hegemonic notions have attributed a deficient identity to them in terms of their English learning process and academic studies. Also most of them have experienced constraints on their pursuit for interpersonal and intercultural belonging, which derived from the complexities and contradictions associated with their personal, social, and ethnic identities. While going through these linguistic and social struggles, they have also realized their own frozen futurism. Through the disillusionment of frozen futurism and their struggles involved in the cross-cultural lives, most of the participants experienced identity reconstruction or a discovery of new meaning. For some of them, their spiritual life has played a big role in this process.

The findings indicate that although my participants' coming to study abroad was motivated by their desire to seek "a better self and future" in terms of academic/social success, they have undergone some modification or

reconstruction in terms of their ideas of "better" during their intercultural learning. Through experience after experience, they gradually realized what more deeply mattered to one's self and redefined their own "good". In this regard, my participants' experiences suggest that their pursuit of "a better identity" has been, after all, a task "to be realized" rather than to be sought. Some obstacles interfered with this task. The *hakbol* (educational credentials)-oriented culture in Korea, associated with the demand of "English for social mobility" derived from the recent globalization discourse, bred the participants competitive spirit, privileging self-achievement over self-cultivation. They tended to idealize life "over there" in their future while finding fault with life "here and now".

This study provides recommendations for how intercultural experiences could be the power of experience not only for educational achievement but also for a meaningful process of self-recovery and agency-enhancement.

Dedication

To God,

Who is compassionate and gracious

Slow to anger, abounding in love. (Psalm, 103:8)

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I would like to express my deep gratitude to all who have accompanied me during this academic journey. Without their mentorship, support, and love, this journey would never have been completed.

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PART 1, INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1, Coming to Question

Introduction

"I was in a Christian fellowship seminar this evening. The topic of the seminar was about 'hurt and bitterness' in our lives. After giving us a short lecture, the lecturer asked us if anyone wanted to share his or her life story of hurt and bitterness with the group. Then, suddenly Mrs. Shin broke down in tears and said, "The bitterness on my heart is that I don't have any desire to live in this world. I don't know what I am worthy of. I feel like I am nobody here. There is not even one thing I can do right here because I can't speak English. I just am so unhappy." "While listening to her, I felt like she was uncovering my own bitterness. People around me usually think I am a very cheerful girl. Yet, I know, deep in my heart, there is another 'me', very unhappy, a distressed 'me'. Every morning I wake up to find this 'unhappy me', and hear its voice saying, 'What can you do here? You are not worthy of anything. You can't speak English. You may never complete your studies here.'...This evening I could identify myself with Mrs. Shin so much. I was also kind of glad that I am not the only one who feels that way."

Listening to my Korean roommate, Song's story, I nodded my head in understanding. I agreed what a terrible feeling it is to be so far from one's home country and live in another language and culture. Another Korean roommate also expressed her understanding of Song's feeling and tried to comfort her. Then, I wondered how it was that we all could share this 'bitter' feeling. What is it about a second language that causes us a sense of loss and depression? What in a second language and culture causes us such an identity crisis? Is there a more fundamental issue beneath this all?

My interest in this issue of cross-cultural/linguistic[1] experience and identity emerges from my reflections on the above questions. And those questions emerge from my own life experiences as a second language learner, teacher and researcher. As a second language teacher, I have observed many of my students'

[1] In this study, "cross-cultural" is an exchangeable term with "intercultural".

struggles with their identities in a second language environment. As a second language learner, I myself have gone through a considerable identity loss and reconstruction. This keeps me pondering about the relationship between language, culture, and identity. Also, as a second language researcher, while encountering a great deal of talks and discussions about the question of identity and culture through books, articles and seminars, I have found myself becoming more engaged with the issue.

The following self-reflection records how my inter-cultural/ linguistic experience and learning have influenced my identity construction and how this experience has compelled me to further study about identity issues of Korean overseas students in the intercultural context. Before I go on, it may be necessary to explain the concept of identity used in my study to provide access to the meanings that the word, "identity" holds for me. Among the many definitions of identity given by scholars in various disciplines, Norton's (1997) definition of identity has received my attention: "identity refers to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future"(p.410). Thus, in this study, identity is applied in a cultural, social and historical sense and the pivotal concept for accounting for identity is "relationship". To illustrate how my relationship to the world, my identity as well as my research questions have developed over time and space, I have structured my reflection according to key episodes in my life, both before and during my cross-cultural life. This autographical narrative serves to give readers more shared understandings and meanings of my interest and role in this research inquiry. As Polkinghorne (1995)

notes, "Stories are directed to understanding human action (inquiry)...Storied memories retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meanings connected with it" (p.19).

Autobiographical Reflection

In Korea, Before the Foreign Journey

Language is a bearer of tradition and tradition is the context of all linguistic behavior (Hall & Arms, 1987, p.295)

Before I came to Canada in 1998, I spent most of my life in Korea, learning English as a foreign language. My first wonderful encounter with the English language happened in my first grade of school. At that time, my family was living in a city near Seoul, where quite a number of American soldiers resided (due to the Korean government's security policy in the early eighties). I remember my dad, one day, shouting at two foreigners who were crossing the street at a red light. He was speaking a very strange language to them and that filled me with wonder. I became even more awestruck when people around us started complimenting my dad on his ability to speak that "strange" language and for saving those foreigners from an accident. As soon as I was alone with my dad, I asked him what the strange language was and he explained that the language is called "English" and that people living far away across the ocean speak that language. That was my first encounter with English and that small event on an ordinary day left me with such an incredible impression of English that it planted a seed for my life-long interest in the English language.

My interest in English had continually grown throughout my childhood and teen-age years, as I was brought up in a family and society that appreciate and even admire the English language. My father, who has been an English teacher all his life, had a strong pride in his job and never-ending passion for learning and teaching English. Thinking of the prestigious status that his English knowledge has provided him - in those days in Korea, teaching English was considered to be a decent job with a sound reputation, his passion for English was understandable. Born in a poor family, my father was the kind of person who had earned financial security and increased social status primarily on the basis of his knowledge of English. Naturally, his passion for English was handed down to his four children and we all have appreciated the English language since the early stages of our lives. Thus, despite my English learning experience in secondary school years, which was nothing but a memory of dull grammar drills and recitations of textbooks, my interest in English continued to increase thanks to my father's encouragement and guidance. When I went on to university in 1990, being an English major was the only choice I could even consider.

My First Foreign Journey to the United States

Identities (are) made in relation to place and displacement, to community and to a sense of dispersal to "roots" as well as "routes" (Yon, 2000, p.7)

Although I loved to learn English throughout my teen-age years, my English learning experience had been quite limited to school textbooks. Moreover, after my family moved to a little country town in a southern province of Korea in my second year of elementary school, I never had further opportunities to meet

any foreigners and to practice spoken English. Thus, when I entered university in Seoul, I realized that my spoken English ability was far behind that of my written skills and that I had to work very hard to catch up on my listening and speaking skills. I can still remember my first English conversation course. Understanding very little of the instructor's talk, I felt embarrassed and ashamed of my poor responses to the instructor. My confidence in English dropped and since then, throughout my university years, I have struggled with a sense of inferiority with my spoken English skills.

Thus, during my university years, as a way to improve my spoken English ability, I yearned to go to an English speaking country and study there. Also, I had a strong desire to experience firsthand the foreign countries which I had read and studied about. Therefore, in my senior year, I went to the United States and took an ESL program for six months. My experience in the U.S.A. was quite exciting. I remember feeling awe, confusion and bewilderment, but most overpowering was the feeling of excitement in experiencing new things on a daily basis. For the first time in my life, I was experiencing a different culture, different ways of eating, thinking and talking. Gradually I realized how culture is embedded in a language and I began to understand the importance and enrichment one can get from learning a second language.

My experience in the U.S.A. had a profound effect on my life because it was at this time that I decided to pursue graduate studies in second language education in North America. During the flight back to Korea, I had a strong desire to return to North America after finishing my undergraduate program. Returning to the university in Seoul, however, I realized that my experience in the

U.S.A. was influencing not only my future plans, but also my present life. My improved English ability was giving me much greater self-confidence than I had expected. I was no longer the shy country girl that I used to be. Along with my improved confidence in undergraduate studies, my desire to pursue graduate studies became more elevated. My father, although happy with my increased self-esteem, was not happy with my plan for further studies. By the time I had finished my undergraduate program, my father wanted me to come back home and work for his English language school. However, I was too ambitious to accept my father's request at that time. Instead, I went onto graduate studies in Seoul and planned to study abroad after the program. My father was quite unhappy with this decision, which led to ongoing conflict with my father during my twenties. Looking back, I now understand how difficult it must have been for my father to accept my decision to pursue further studies and my own career when the convention of my hometown still says, "If a girl studies too much, she will never get married and will live an unhappy life"[2]. Anyhow, after graduate school in Seoul, I did go back home and worked for my father's school for two years. When I left for Canada in 1998, I had an ambivalent feeling towards home.

My Second Foreign Journey to Canada and the Beginning of Identity Quest

The discovery of who I am must be made through an inexorable journey through births....I must come to understand myself as being born of my mother, and born of my father before I can be born of my own deep self....In a deep sense, though, really, parents are simply metaphors or analogies for culture. To truly be born again, one has to undertake the long, hard journey into one's own culture, to

[2] In Korean, "여자가 공부 너무 많이 하면 결혼 못하고 불행한 삶을 산다"(Yeojaga gongburul neomu mani hamyeon gyeolhon moshago bulhaenghan salmeul sanda)

examine it critically, to see how one had been shaped by it, constructed through it. (Smith, 2002 b, p.165)

I started my life in Canada as a full time international graduate student at UBC. The first year was tough. To take an ESL course in a foreign country for a short time was one thing; to pursue graduate studies and live in a foreign country for an extended period of time was completely different. The unfamiliarity of cultural behaviors, Canadian academic approaches to teaching and learning, and the social interactions in this foreign academic context led me to feel seriously disabled. For the first time in my life, I realized how linguistic change could deprive one of a sense of self. Of course, the experience was accompanied with many struggles related to the tension between my home culture and Canadian culture, and to my past and present. Sarup (1996) once defined identity as "the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story others tell of us". He also pointed out, "our identities are not free-floating; they are limited by borders and boundaries" (p.3). As I crossed my cultural/ linguistic boundaries, I realized that there were discrepancies between the stories I expect to tell (or hear) and the stories I actually have to tell of myself. Moreover, I found that some of my stories were full of disconnections and contradictions. For instance, in one version of my story, I valued the "freedom" and independence of life style, which the Canadian "individualistic" culture offered me. In the other version, however, I badly missed the "belonging"/to, and the warmth of the "collectivistic" lifestyle of my home culture. Needless to say, these inner conflicts were affecting my learning experiences. I found myself suffering insecurity and anxiety in many aspects of academic life.

Eventually, my identity crisis led me to an inner journey. After several months at UBC, I found myself confronting some of the ultimate questions of life - Who am I? Where did all these stories come from? What is my true identity? Although I had asked these questions before and thought I knew the answers, at that time everything started to become more confused. Those questions eventually led me on a journey towards my roots- my past and, ultimately, to my religious beliefs. For some reason, deep in my heart, I felt that the discovery of who I am is not irrelevant to religious quest. Although I was brought up in a Christian family, it was not until this point that I genuinely started to seek God and to inquire into my personal belief system. The journey towards God was difficult. It required of me the deconstruction of my past and reconciliation with my inner being. I realized how much the relationship with my father had been affecting me and I knew that I had to deal with it at that time.

After a year of grieving and weeping, the grace of God started to come into the core of my being. I gradually recovered from my fragile identity and reconciled myself to my inner conflicts. In this process, I came to have a better understanding of my father; I grew to see him not just as my father, but also as a person who was shaped by his own generation's values and culture. The process was slow and painful, but on looking back, the change that occurred in me during that period was so huge that I felt like I had been born again from deep within my being. The change started to influence my school life as well. After realizing how my perception of identity had been deeply influenced by my parents' educational culture- that is, an instrumentally-guided tradition, where one's education was a source and criterion of one's worth and value, I came to grasp my own sense of

personal agency in a new way. My spiritual alignment allowed me to see and nourish the intrinsic value in myself granted by God, thus freeing me from a competitive approach in my learning, which I had grown accustomed to in an instrumentally guided and collectivist culture.

By the time I finished my program at UBC in 2000, I was admitted to the U of A for doctoral studies. However, I had to take some time off before I received financial support. While taking this break, I started to tutor Korean overseas students and became involved with a church ministry as a layperson. As the church I attended was focusing on ministering to Korean international students, I had a good opportunity to meet many students from different backgrounds and to see many aspects of international students' lives. It was at this time that my interest in Korean overseas students' studying abroad experiences and identity further developed.

While working and living with Korean international students, I noticed that many of these students were struggling with their identity to various degrees in different sites of experiences across their cultural/ linguistic contexts. Just as my case, their migration provided them with an opportunity to be aware of themselves and their identities. However, there seems to be many differences in the ways of perceiving themselves and dealing with their struggles.

To illustrate some cases, Eun, one of my former students, came to Canada two years ago to pursue her undergraduate studies. Although she was a hard-working student, she felt she was always far behind in her classes. Suffering a sense of inferiority, she isolated herself from Korean communities and pushed herself to work harder. However, during her studies, she also found herself

alienated from Canadian classmates or communities as she felt some resistance to Canadian ways of communication and social interactions. Lonely and excluded, all she hoped for was to get a degree as soon as possible and find a decent job in Korea. To Eun, the perception of her identity is strongly related to her success at school and the only way to overcome her insecurity is to master English language and to achieve her academic goals.

My ex-roommate, Song's case was a little different. Although she went through a serious identity crisis in terms of her English ability and academic achievement in Canada (as shown in my introduction), she decided not to go back to Korea and stayed in Canada. She now works for a Korean company in Vancouver after quitting school. She believed that Canada offers her better space to "be herself" than Korea as she felt those competitive lifestyles of Korea and its social norms split her perception of self. However, she seems to experience continual confusions and conflicts between her desire to live in a Canadian society and her lack of confidence in a second language, that is, that because of the level of her English she will suffer a lack of upward mobility in terms of her career development in Canada.

To some of my students and friends, their border-crossing processes have become a transformational experience. Through the troubling experience of "multiple- identities" and a sense of ambiguity during their second language learning and cultural adaptations, they grew to gain some objective distance from their past experiences and deconstruct their life-worlds and their identities. Either through friendship or religious awakening, they became able to integrate all the different parts of self and experience self-reconstruction.

However, it seemed to me that, despite the different ways of understanding and negotiating identities, there was one common aspect of identity that is linked to most of international students' identity struggles -"past-present relation" (Sarup, 1996) and its "reconciliation". For some people, this becomes conscious and the reconciliation becomes a place of new self-recovery. For others, the past-present relation is less prominent or more repressed. And for some individuals, it remains as a site of on-going struggle, because perhaps "the past-present relation is often contradictory and ambivalent" (Sarup, 1996, p. 40).

These experiences with fellow international students and my own identity inquiry deepened my interest in international students' cross-cultural/linguistic experiences and their identity construction process. Many questions emerged: What is our "investment" [3] in border-crossings and second language learning? How does our personal history, along with social and cultural tradition, interact with our identity construction? What are we, as individuals in relation to others, experiencing when we move from one (native) language and culture to another? How do our understandings of identities interact with learning experiences and cultural adaptations? Who does and does not experience identity transformation? What enables us to make a self-recovery or sustain self-in-transition?

My Home-Returning Experiences

It seems useful to ask of every identity what it tacitly implies and what it does not say. Either all around or in its wake, the explicit requires the implicit (Sarup, 1996, p.24)

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[3] According to Norton (2000), "the notion of investment signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (p.10). More detailed explanations are provided in the next chapter.

For the last six years of my residency in Canada, I returned home twice. My first return was after three years of residence in Canada, when I was about to start my Ph.D. program. When I was informed of my father's sudden hospitalization, I went back home and stayed there for six months until his full recovery. My second return was in the following year, was when my fiancé, Song, and I planned to have a wedding in our home country. We spent our whole summer there and came back to Canada after our wedding.

For many other sojourners, returning experiences may be associated with physical and psychological readjustment problems or reverse culture shock. In my case, perhaps as my returns were not intended as an extended stay, readjustment was not the major challenge. The real challenge was confronting the incompatibility of my changes (after being abroad) with some of the relational and societal expectations I returned to. It, naturally, led me to re-examine my personal and cultural values, beliefs and what was important in my life. The process inevitably accompanied a sense of confusion and ambivalence.

For instance, during my first return, I had a desire to come back to Canada to start the Ph.D. program, which I had deferred for a half year. However, when I had to make a final decision whether to come back or not, I felt seriously confused and split in the space between traditional cultural values and my own desires. Some of my relatives and family viewed my desire for further studies as being too selfish. They saw it as some negative change made in me after living abroad. In their eyes, I was deserting an important cultural value in our society such as,

"filial piety is more important than self- fulfillment"[4]. Although, in my view, my leaving would not conflict with my filial piety, it was considered by most Korean elders to be a discharging of my filial duties. However, because my desire for further studies did not mean to me a way of self-fulfillment either, I felt that my own personal belief about who I am was not fitting into any certain identification.

A similar experience happened during my second return trip as well. When Song and I talked to my parents about our wish for marriage, we had to face a serious objection toward our marriage. The primary reason was that Song had not been educated as long as I had. My parents and their friends kept telling me that it is our social norm that a husband's education should be superior to that of the wife and that I cannot live against such social norms as I am a Korean. I understood their concern, but I couldn't accept it as mine and give up the wedding to a man I loved and wanted to spend the rest of my life with. However, I could not carry out the wedding either without my parents' agreement because I held a firm personal and cultural belief that a wedding is the unification of not only the bride and groom but also their two families. Our struggle at the intersection of different subjectivities was so great that both my husband and I still recall the time as one of the hardest days that we have ever had. When we were, at last, able to have a wedding with my parents' blessings, we couldn't help but consider it a miracle!

Painful as they were, these home-returning experiences deepened my apprehension of the complex nature of our identities. It seemed that the values, norms, habits, and beliefs that we learned living within a particular culture and language are bound within a complex web of our understanding of who we are.

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[4] In Korean, "효가 자아 성취보다 더 중요하다" (Hyoga jaa seongchwiboda deo jung yeohada)

However, our identities can develop or change according to the different cultural realities and language we experience. This change may provide a tremendous growth in terms of personal understanding, but may also cause feelings of ambivalence and contradiction when returning to the home culture. Since we come with a broad range of identity parts which are always being influenced and reevaluated, it may be sometimes so difficult to define us in certain coherent words and place ourselves in one pocket in terms of who we are. This then raises many questions in me such as: if identity can be seen as a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of social and personal roles blend and clash, how do we work on these clashes within us? How do we respond to the fluid and incomplete nature of our identities? And how does that reshape our understanding of who we are in relation to others? What enables us to cultivate openness to ambiguity or contradiction of identities and reestablish patterns of connection to our lives?

My Present Cross-Cultural Life in Canada

Like any relationship, cross-cultural learning is ongoing labor of love (Mapherson, 1997. p.40)

I still remember the shock I had when I first experienced an undergraduate classroom during my first year at UBC. Unlike my expectations, nearly one half of the students in the class had black hair and brown eyes. Due to an increase in travel and the power of the English language in the globalized world, the number of international students continues to rise in North America. Unlike my overseas experience in the U. S.A. in the early nineties, I no longer have to go back to my home country in order to speak the Korean language and experience the Korean

culture. In my second language context, right here in Canada, I am constantly experiencing an exchange and mix of Korean and Canadian culture. For instance, when I stay in my office or interact with people at school, I speak English and think and act according to Canadian customs. When I am at home, however, I find myself thinking and acting in Korean ways. Also, when I go to my church where I associate with many Korean-Canadians, I keep switching my language and actions from one to another.

Living in this continual exchange and mixture of cultures, I often wonder how this expansion of cultural exchange affects second language learners' identities. What changes have been made in how we perceive the differences and similarities between cultures, and how they interact with our identities? How do we appropriate and transform aspects of different cultures and languages and how does that influence our identities and learning experiences?

In my understanding, current Western discourses such as poststructuralism and postmodernism views, this explosion of ethnic and national identities, along with the pluralist demands of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, gay rights and so forth), has produced a proliferation of particularisms (Hall, 1992). As more and more people assert their differences or their particularisms, postmodernism argues that contemporary societies can no longer have any totalizing universal truth-claims. They emphasize social and cultural pluralism and believe that our identities are multiple and mobile from one discursive context to another (Bauman, 1996; Belsey, 2002).

Although I agree with the poststructuralists' and postmodernists' idea that our identities are incomplete, heterogeneous, and multiple, I have more difficulty

agreeing with the postmodernists' rejection of universal truth. Is the difference of cultures something that cannot be accommodated within an universalist framework? If the differential identity is to be fully achieved, can it be only so within some set of universal principles that the different ethnicities, groups and individuals share with the rest of society? I am aware that these questions of mine are deeply shaped by my Asian cultural background as well as my religious background. Through the books and discussions I came across during my graduate studies (e.g., MacPherson, 2000; Park, 1996; Smith, 1997), I realized that there is a certain difference between Eastern and Western ways of identity quest[5]. This awareness then makes me more curious: Whether and to what extent do the lived experiences of Korean overseas students, their stories of cross-cultural/linguistic experiences and identity formation support this Western perspective? Where are our Korean overseas students' personal narratives located within current Western academic theories on identity, culture and language?

So far, I have reflected on my inter-cultural experience and developing identity and how I came to be engaged in this proposed study. Through these life-experiences, conversations with fellow international students, and my personal explorations, I thought there was a need to further understand the meaning of studying abroad experiences and how our identities interact with these phenomena. I considered that there must be some valuable and deeper insights that this dynamic relation among identity, culture and language provide us in terms of intercultural education and second language education. Also, if it is possible to gain a better understanding of complexities involved in identity construction and

[5] For example, Park (1996) explains the difference between dualistic orientation of West and non-dualistic approach of East. It will be discussed in the next chapter.

cultural adaptation, perhaps greater insights can be gained into many aspects - personal, philosophical, relational - of our educational lives. The purpose and rationale of this study can now be explained.

The Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the studying abroad experiences and identity through the lived experiences of Korean overseas students who have studied in Canada. The issue is approached from sociocultural and critical perspectives of language learning and identity[6]. This study is an intensive exploration of a limited number of personal cases. It concerns the nature and significance of four Korean overseas students' studying abroad experiences and how the experiences have interacted with the individuals' identity de/re/construction process. Through informal and open-ended conversational interviews, this qualitative study examines major characteristics of their intercultural/ linguistic experiences and how their identities have been (re)constructed and transformed across cultural and linguistic settings and over time. Also, the study explores affective, socio-cultural, historical, ideological, religious factors associated with their changing understanding and practices of identities before and during cross-cultural /linguistic contact.

The rationale for this inquiry is fourfold. First of all, the inquiry is intended to deepen my own self-understanding or self-realization. By exploring my fellow Korean overseas students' personal narratives and stories of studying abroad experiences, I hoped to further understand the questions and concerns

[6] They will be discussed in the next chapter.

raised in my reflection above. In other words, this research project is a way of understanding my own life inquiry in relation to cross-cultural life and issues of identity by engaging with the horizons of others.

Also, through this study, I hoped to provide the participants of this study with an opportunity to reflect on and examine their own studying abroad experiences and the meaning of them to their lives. From my experience with some international students, I realized that the lack of well-developed self-understanding of cross-cultural experiences could increase the danger of alienation and failure in terms of language learning and cultural adaptation. Duff and Uchida (1997) note that, "in examining such abstract constructs as culture and identity, collaborative inquiry and self-reflection on the parts of participants are very valuable as they facilitate the process of understanding how participants in cross-cultural contexts resolve conflicts that relate to their socio-cultural roles and personae" (p.479). Gentil (2000) also points out that the examination of the historical construction of a self offers potential for understanding individual agency and at the same time recognizes the complex and pervading constraints offered by social worlds. I hoped that this research project would invite my participants to such understanding and recognition.

Third, this inquiry is pursued not just for my own self-understanding and my participants' critical reflections on their experiences. It is also for educators who teach or help English language learners who undergo cross-cultural/linguistic experiences. By exploring the nature, interactions, and significance of factors that shape the participants' studying abroad experiences and their perceptions of identity in this process, this study intends to help English or intercultural

educators to be more aware and better understand the complexities and dynamics involved in such educational practice. In turn, this enriched understanding will shed light on what needs to be considered by them in order to enhance their overseas students' agency as well as language mastery. Traditionally, as Luzio-Lockett (1998) points out, "the general ethos of the second language enterprise has tended to subsume personal experiential elements to a predominantly cognitive core" (p.221). The emerging sociocultural perspective of SLA research, however, reminds us that cross-cultural/linguistic learning is not just a cognitive journey, but an integration of the personal, emotional, experiential journey associated with one's sociocultural world. This perspective calls for our need to understand "learner as both socially constructed and constrained but also as embodied, semiotic and emotional persons" (Norton and Toohey, 2001, p.123). Smith (1999b) once noted that "attention to language means also an attention to the life conditions of those dwelling in the language"(p.113). Indeed, without good attention to and understanding of these issues- learners' life conditions and how they position themselves within them, any forms of good language teaching will always be challenged. Thus, through this study, I hoped to contribute to the enhancement of such understandings.

Finally, in addition to enriching our understanding about studying abroad experiences, this study has another educational significance. Focusing on current Korean overseas student's cases, this study will add to the previous studies on language and identity new insights and knowledge about recent Korean overseas students' social and cultural practices, references, assumptions and values.

Although there have been many research studies on language socialization and identity issues related to second language learners in the field of SLA, most of these studies were limited to a group of immigrants and few studies have dealt with Korean overseas students. According to Robinson (1991), Korea has undergone a fundamental reordering of its social, educational system and culture during the period of its modernization and globalization processes, but few studies have been conducted on how this sociocultural change has affected recent Korean overseas students' identity construction process.

I believe that current Korean overseas students have an unique sociocultural background - not only did they go through a severe Korean modernization process, but they also experienced a continual exchange and mix of languages and cultures due to the increase in travel and trends of globalization. Yet, how this unique sociocultural background of Korean overseas students interacts with their identity formation and learning experience has seldom been investigated, even though they are one of the growing ethnic groups in North American educational institutions (Lee, 2001)

In this respect, I believe that there is a need to examine subjective meanings that recent Korean overseas students hold about their own identities and how these meanings are negotiated or de/re/constructed across historical time and social/cultural space. Through the rich stories and reflections told by the students themselves, this study will increase our cross-cultural sensitivity and enrich our understanding about how Korean ethnicity, culture and social values intersect with their self- understandings and studying abroad experiences. This, in turn,

may contribute to developing more appropriate educational interventions that meets the needs of Korean overseas students.

Research Questions

There are two research questions, which guide this study. They are:

1. What are the major characteristics of the participants' studying abroad experiences?

2. How do these experiences interact with/in their identification process (identity)? In other words, how have the participants' understandings of identities been (re)constructed or transformed across cultural/linguistic space and over time? What factors are associated with those changes?

From the perspective of contemporary sociocultural and critical approaches to language learning and identity, this study focuses on a biographical/historical and contextual basis for the foregrounding, backgrounding, and transforming aspects of participants' identities and cross-cultural/linguistic learning. The research questions guiding this study, thus, include many aspects of the following questions, some of which have been called for investigation by other SLA researchers (Duff and Uchida, 1997; Norton, 2002; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000):

Who attempts studying abroad and what affects the studying abroad process?
What is the role of English in how Korean overseas students' perceive themselves and their life stories?
How do Korean overseas students reconcile their own perspectives of who they are - their linguistic, social, cultural, ideological, religious values and identities- with national stereotypes of their own and others across cultural space and time?
What is the role of spirituality in their identity de/re/construction process?
How do their changing understandings of themselves influence their learning and the meaning of studying abroad experiences?

This study aims at understanding many of these aspects related to the overarching research questions.

The study is divided into three parts: introduction (chapter one, two, and three), narratives (chapter four, five, six, and seven), and synthesis (chapter eight and nine). In part one, chapter one presents an introduction to this study by providing my autobiographical reflection and the rationale of the study. Chapter two reviews the literature that has shaped the theoretical framework of this study and chapter three discusses the research methodology of the study. In part two, from chapter four to seven, four stories of each participant's cross-cultural experiences are presented in a narrative form. Then, in part three, chapter eight provides a synthetic interpretation of the case stories by discussing some common themes running through the narratives. In chapter nine, the implications and the conclusion of the study are discussed.

Chapter 2, Literature Review

In this chapter, I review several bodies of literature to configure the perspective of this study. The chapter consists of two sections. The first part reviews socio-cultural perspectives of language learning and identity, which provides a theoretical framework of this research study. This also serves as the big picture which situates the second part of literature review. In the second part, I review two sets of literatures related to more concrete contexts of this study: the critical perspective on English pedagogy and the sociocultural background of Korean overseas students will be discussed.

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, several researchers (Davis, 1995, Norton, 1997, 2000; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Van Lier, 2000) in language learning have criticized SLA and applied linguistics research as traditionally viewing language as a set of idealized forms independent of its social, cultural, and historical contexts. They point out that much research in SLA has traditionally considered language learning as a mental, individual process, rather than a social process. In this tradition, the identity of second language learners is seen as individual language producers and characterized in terms of relatively fixed and long-term traits or characteristics. According to Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), the mainstream of SLA research can be informed by the conduit metaphor. The conduit metaphor assumes that "minds are containers and that language itself is also a container, into which speakers insert meaning that they transmit to listeners, who subsequently

unpackage the containers, extract the meanings and insert them into their own minds" (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998, p.424).

More fundamentally, the assumptions underlying the SLA research tradition are derived from structuralist theories of language, associated predominantly with the work of Saussure. Saussure (1966) viewed language as a shared pattern and structure of signs that are comprised of the signifier (sound) and signified (meaning). He claimed that meanings reside in the sign and nowhere else. He saw the "linguistic system itself as guaranteeing the meaning of signs and each linguistic community as having its own set of signifying practices that give value to the signs in a language" (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p.116).

Recently, poststructuralists have criticized this structuralist idea of language on the grounds that it can not account for struggles over the meaning that can be attributed to signs in a given language. That is, the signs can have different meanings for different people within the same linguistic community. Thus, structuralism is criticized for conceiving of signs as having idealized meanings and of linguistic communities as being relatively homogeneous and consensual (Norton & Toohey, 2001). In other words, it has the problem of denying the relevance of the heterogeneous character of a linguistic community and the role of human relations in learning and using language.

In recent language learning research, poststructuralist theories of language have become attractive to SLA research, especially in the field of sociocultural approaches and more serious attention has been given to the social nature of self and sociality of second language learning. This study of Korean overseas students is situated within this contemporary sociocultural research tradition. Thus, in the

following pages, I present some theoretical perspectives that have been a basis for the sociocultural approach in SLA. Underlying these theoretical perspectives is the assumption that there is an interdependence between the language learner and his or her social, cultural, ideological and historical environment.

Socio-cultural Approach: Language, Learning, Identity

Theories of language

In recent conceptions of identity and language learning, the poststructuralist theories of language have come increasingly to the forefront. While structrualists view language as a neutral set of rules and structures, poststructuralists view language as offering ways to think about language within particular interlocutors and sets of circumstances.

Such perspective is attested in Bakhtin's work (1981, 1986). Unlike the structuralists, Bakhtin asserts that language needs to be seen not as a set of idealized forms divorced from their speakers but rather as a situated utterance, in which speakers, in dialogue with others, struggle to create meanings. He believed in the importance of studying speech or utterances in both historical and contemporary contexts. For him, any utterance is closely linked to one's past, present, and future contexts. His explanation about how speakers come to participate in discourse with others helps us understand this point. He explains that we develop our discourses by appropriating others' words. That is, speakers take words from other people's mouths; they appropriate those utterances, and gradually those utterances come to serve their needs and replay their meanings. As people initially appropriate the utterances of others and bend those utterances

to their own intentions, they enter the communicative chain and become able to fashion their own voices. As Bakhtin (1981) notes:

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concert contexts, serving other people's intentions (p. 293-294)

Bakhtin points out that language is not a neutral medium but rather populated with the intention of others and that language development is a matter of appropriating the words of others. For him, the appropriation of others' words is a complex and conflicting process since words contain the historical, present, and future positioning of speakers and those of their interlocutors. Also words express particular cognitive predispositions and particular value systems. Thus, the customary discourse of any particular community may privilege or debase certain speakers. From this perspective, language learning is not just a linguistic struggle but also a social one.

Bourdieu's work (1977, 1991) concurs with Bakhtin. His work on the relationship between identity and symbolic power which focuses on socially constructed conditions in which language users are interacting in speech, helps us to look at language in the broader context of social relationships. Bourdieu suggests that the values ascribed to speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks and that the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships. Like Bakhtin, Bourdieu reminds us that language cannot be idealized and that language learning cannot be apart from

an understanding of social relationships, which are rarely constituted on equal terms.

Theories of learning

The recent poststructuralist view of language discussed above is congruent with recent sociocultural perspective on theories of language learning. Sociocultural research has attempted to investigate language learning as a socioculturally situated social practice. This research conceptualizes second language learning as relational activity that occurs between specific speakers situated in specific sociocultural contexts. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as relationships among learners and between learners and social contexts. Lave and Wenger (1991) see the social contexts of learners as the complex communities in which people engage in specific, local, historically constructed, changing practices. A community of practice defined as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p.98). Lave and Wenger also suggest the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation', which describes learning as an engagement or participation in community, where participants have all varied degrees of familiarity with the practices of the community. By this notion, they point out that:

> Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practice of a community. 'Legitimate peripheral participation' provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of community of practices (p.29).

From this perspective, learning is understood as a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. Learners are viewed as "members of social and historical collectives" (Norton & Toohey, 2001) and learning involves an evolving form of relations between learners. As Lave and Wenger further note:

> Viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership. We conceive of identities as long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another (p.53).

From this perspective, Norton asserts (2000) that educational research might focus not so much on assessing individual 'uptake' of particular knowledge or skills but rather on the social structures in particular communities and on the variety of positioning available for learners to occupy in those communities. Accordingly, Norton & Toohey (2001) suggest that second language researchers be interested in questions such as: "How do community practices facilitate or block access to experienced speakers? How do community practices structure "possibilities for selfhood?" (p. 120).

From this point of view, attention to language learning requires a close attention to the identities of language learners. As learners participate in a community of practice, their relations within the community changes and their understanding of the practice continuously develops. This entails changes in a learner's identity. The more recent work of Wenger (1998) on learning, meaning and identity addresses this close connection of community practice and identity more explicitly. He notes that "because learning transforms who we are and what

we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming. It is in the formation of identity that learning can become a source of meaningfulness and of personal and social energy" (p. 215). The issue of language learners' identity is discussed more in the following section.

Theories of the learner

According to Norton (2000), much SLA research traditionally sees the identity of second language learners in terms of relatively fixed and long-term traits or characteristics. She argues that SLA theory needs to develop a more textured understanding of the relationship between the language learners and the social world.

Drawing on poststructuralist work, especially the work of Weedon (1997), Norton suggests a new conception of the language learner in the field of SLA. Weedon's concepts of language and of subjectivity were influential to Norton's work: Weedon (1997) notes that "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (p.27). She also defines subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p.32). Applying Weedon's concepts of subjectivity to her theory of social identity, Norton (1997) defines identity as: "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (1997, p.410). Criticizing SLA as tending to

dichotomize the language learner and social contexts, she emphasizes the important connection between language learners and their social world. She points out that:

> Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation (1997, p. 410).

In taking this position, she conceives identity of language learners not as static and one-dimensional but as "complex, contradictory and changing" over social space and historical time (2000, p.11). From this perspective, Norton further argues that second language learning needs to be understood with reference to larger social structures that influence learners' affective factors and identities. In developing a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and social world, she suggests the notion of "investment" instead of "motivation". She (2000) points out that:

> The concept of motivation does not capture the complex relationship between power, identity and language learning. The concept of investment, which I introduced in Norton (1995), signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it... It is important to note that the notion of investment is not equivalent to instrumental motivation. The conception of instrumental motivation presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner...The notion of investment conceives the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires (p. 10-11).

In this light, Norton contests the view of language learners as individual language producers and suggests seeing them as "members of social and historical collectivities" (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p.121). From this perspective, second language learning must be understood through an examination of social, cultural,

and historical conditions of learning and learners' changing identities across historical time and social space. Further, Norton and Toohey note that "the goal of future research on identity and language learning is to develop an understanding of learners as both socially constructed and constrained but also as embodied, semiotic and emotional persons who identify themselves, resist identifications, and act on their social worlds" (p.123).

So far, I have reviewed the theoretical perspective that conceptualizes the complex relationship between language learner's identity and their social, cultural, and historical world. Within this theoretical perspective, language and learning are seen as relationships among learners and between learners and their sociocultural contexts (Van Lier, 2000). The identities of learners are constantly influenced by a myriad of internal and environmental conditions and relationships they evolve during their learning journey. This theoretical perspective has become influential in SLA research and has brought forth a number of research studies that try to examine the sociality of second language learning and the identity formation of second language learners. The following section provides an overview of some of these empirical research studies.

SLA Research Studies on Identity and Language Socialization

Applying the sociocultural perspective on identity and language learning, some researchers attempted to develop a more textured understanding of the relationship between second language learners and their linguistic/cultural socialization (Bosher, 1997; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Gunderson, 2000; Norton, 1995, 2000; Schecter and Bayley, 1997; Valde, 1998; Yan, 2003). Such research

studies are interested in the multiple identities of language learners as persons with diverse histories and identifications in relation to their socio-cultural worlds.

For example, Norton's study (1995, 2000) of five immigrant women in Canada examines how their socially and historically constructed relationships to the target language bear on their second language learning experiences. Drawing on data she collected through diaries, questionnaires, and individual and group interviews for an extended period of time, Norton convincingly describes how second language learning is deeply linked to the learner's social identity, which is "a site of struggle, multiple and subject to change" (1995, p.14).

In her study, all five immigrant women's learning experiences indicate that their investment in English intersects with their changing and multiple identities, which are constantly influenced by the social relations of gender, ethnicity and class. Their experiences prove Norton's claim that second language learning cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships that learners make in a particular time and space. From this perspective, Norton also argues that "each learner's investment in English must be understood with reference to her reasons for coming to Canada, her plans for the future and her changing identity" (2000, p.17). The voices of particular learners, their distinctive histories, their unique desires for the future are considered to be important to develop an enhanced understanding of the relationship between identity and language learning. As implications of her findings for second language education, she argues that language teachers need to develop an understanding of their students' investments in the target language and their changing identities.

Schecter and Bayley 's study (1997) of language socialization among Mexican-descent families in California also shows the dynamic relationship among language, culture and identity. In this interview study, Schecter and Bayley analyze and compare the language behaviors of four Mexian-descendent families. Their findings indicate that participants' language practices vary, which may be attributed to differences on the sociocultural ecologies of the two communities that the families represent. The families' language practice differed with respect to the depth of their ties to the US and to their own communities. Emphasizing the role of sociocultural ecologies in language practice and cultural identity as well as the diversity of immigrants' language socialization practices, Schecter and Bayley (1997) argue that second language educators need to recognize the diverse socialization practices of minority students and provide opportunities for open discussion about identities in acculturation processes.

Valde (1998)'s study explored two Latino immigrant girls' language socialization in the United States. The data collected in this longitudinal case study show that the interplay of school systems and the two girls' sociocultural backgrounds plays a critical role in their second language development and socialization. Her findings also indicate that clear and unambiguous language learning objectives must be provided for immigrant students' success in second language acquisition. As an implication, Valde (1998) argues that ESL teachers must develop an understanding of immigrant students' needs and help students to develop their own voices.

Similarly, Gunderson (2000) explored the lived experiences of teen-age immigrant students in Canada. His study involves approximately 35,000

immigrant students who spoke 148 first languages, came from 132 countries, and represented all socioeconomic levels. Several common themes emerged from this study. First, students confront racism in many forms. The source of this racism is closely related to socioeconomic issues and struggles with new environments. Second, students express their difficulties in interacting with native speakers for various sociolinguistic reasons. Third, students' abilities to learn language and to learn academic content are limited by differences between their first cultures and the culture of schools. Fourth, with respect to their ESL classes, students' responses to the questionnaires are significantly different, depending on schools and their socioeconomic status. Generally, students in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods and schools view their ESL courses positively because of the contributions their English will make to them regarding job and education opportunities; a large majority of students are not succeeding in schools because of their limited English ability. This discourages the use of students' first languages and bilingual programs. Some students, however, are concerned that learning English and losing their first language will have a significant effect on their acceptance as members of their home country. Summarizing the above themes, Gunderson notes that "many students are lost in the spaces between various identities: the teenagers, the immigrant, the first language speaker, the individual from the first culture, the individual socializing into a second language and culture, the individual with neither a dominant first or second culture, but one not of either culture" (p.12). He claims that teachers need to take an interest in students' languages and cultures to prevent them from failing to learn. The

numerous extracts Gunderson presents in this study support his claim and provide much food for thought.

While Gunderson's study focuses on language learners' sociocultural identities, Duff and Uchida (1997) look at those of language teachers. In this six-month ethnographic study, they explored how teachers' sociocultural identities and practices are negotiated and transformed over time. The lives of two Japanese and two American teachers who teach English in Japan are explored through interviews, classroom observations, journals, and questionnaires. The findings of this study show that the teachers' perceptions of their sociocultural identities were deeply rooted in their personal histories, based on past educational, professional, and cross-cultural experiences and that they were also subject to constant negotiation due to changing contextual elements (p.460). Also, common themes included the teachers' quest for interpersonal and intercultural connections in that EFL context and their need for educational control. Providing in-depth discussions on the emerged common themes, Duff and Uchida (1997) also uncover various factors associated with culture transmission in EFL classrooms and the border- crossing. As an implication of their findings, Duff and Uchida (1997) suggest a combination of biographical and contextual practice oriented reflection in ESL/EFL teacher educations.

Recent work by Yan (2003) also explores the interplay of intercultural experiences and the identity negotiation process. By examining the intercultural experiences of four Asian graduate students studying in America, Yan attempts to identify how her participants negotiate the meaning of their intercultural experiences and how they conceptualize their own learning and identity across

time and space. The findings of the study outline how individual's identity formation process is interwoven with their complex relationship to the English language and American culture. For instance, it is shown that the participants' culturally hegemonic notions and their perceptions of the American dream influenced their identity construction through their use of English and their intercultural experiences. Also, the family and academic roles they were playing at a particular time affected their perceptions of their foreign journey. Emphasizing that the entire processes of identity recognition and reconstruction are not linear but multidimensional, Yan (2003) argues that it is important for sojourners to develop their interpretive sensitivity through self-inquiry or reflection in order to advance their educational practice and personal growth.

In sum, the SLA research studies I reviewed above indicate that "second language learning is a complex social practice, rather than an abstract, internalized skill" (Norton, 2000, p.129). They remind us of the importance of understanding language learners as "members of social and historical collectives" and language learning as "socioculturally situated practice" (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p.119). This study is situated within this research tradition. With the base established through the review of general theoretical framework and research studies, I now turn to this research study and review several bodies of literature related to more concrete contexts of the study in the next section. Through a review of this set of literature situated in a socio-cultural approach, I try to make the perspective of this research become more contextualized and grounded.

Contexts of the Study

English and Power

The poststructuralist and sociocultural perspective of language has been adopted by some critical language theorists in the area of education, and English as an international language has been analyzed and examined as a cultural, social, and ideological medium rather than a neutral linguistic tool in a body of literature in the area of English education (Crystal, 1997; Kachru, 1986, 1996; Pennycook, 1994, 1999; Phillipson, 1992; Phillipson & Skutnabb-kangas, 1996).

Kachru's (1986) and Crystal's (1997) study of English as a global language helps us to understand English as a cultural and ideological medium. Kachru (1986) divides countries into three groups based on the use of English: inner, outer, expanding circles. The inner circles refers to countries where English is used as a dominant language (e.g., the U.S., Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia) The outer circle refers to countries where English is used as an official or second language (e.g., India, Singapore, Philippines, Ghana, Kenya). The expanding circle indicates countries where English is considered as an important foreign language (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, Poland, Russia). Kachru notes that the expanding circle has been rapidly growing in the past few decades, which explains why English is called today a global lingua franca. While the spread of English has a long history, the notion of English as a global language is relatively new. Crystal (1997) argues that it was not until in the 1950s that English was labeled an international language. He claims that "a language does not become a global language merely because of its inherent linguistic properties or its association with certain cultural or regional factor" (p.7). In order for a language

to be a global language, Crystal argues that the language must have political, military, and economic power. By the 1950s the U.S became an influential power in the international politics and economy. Therefore, the reason English gained the status of international language has a lot to do with the global status of the U.S.

In a similar vein, Phillipson (1992) analyzes the role of English as a global language throughout the history of U.S imperialism. Exploring how a political, economical, cultural, and language domination of the nations with power over others is currently represented by a world dominance of the U.S, Phillipson stresses English as an essential medium to foster the spread of cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values of the U.S to other countries. This critical understanding of the role of English based on hegemonic power relationships in the context of globalization is also discussed in Mingnolo (1998). He points out that contemporary globalization needs to be analyzed in relation to imperialism of Western culture and knowledge. While analyzing hegemonic power of language in relation to cultural and knowledge production, he points out that most language and literacy studies have been maintained within the framework of cultural practice of dominant societies of the West countries in the past and of the U.S in the present era of globalization.

According to critical language theorists (e.g., Pennycook, 1994, 1999; Phillipson, 1992), a hegemonic relationship between languages and cultural practices in the process of globalization is reflected in the current educational practices between native and non-English speaking countries. One example of such educational practices may include an almost unidirectional flow of international students from non-English speaking countries to the West (Rhee,

2002). Currently, in many non-English speaking countries such as China, Japan and Korea, English and educational training in the West has become a powerful means to educational, career and economic success. English language and its power is legitimated and equated with progress and property due to the increasing market demand of world economy (Phillipson, 1992). In other words, the power of English as a global language is connected to the central logic of globalization, that is, market logic (Smith, 2006), which eventually serves the interests of the U.S and maintains its dominant position in the world-economy, mass media, educational industry (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996). A new process of cultural imperialism is in place and the language behind the nation of power is English.

The connection between language, culture, and ideology is also critically examined by Pennycook (1994), who investigates the role of English in the broader and more critical contexts of politics, culture, economics and education. He argues that English has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion or exclusion from further education, employment or social positions in many societies. In this regard, Pennycook(1994) argues that the role that English plays in social and economic divisions within countries has profound implications on English as a gatekeeper at the global level. One such implication is the phenomenon of Americanization of non-English speaking people for whom English is believed to be the key medium for access to educational and economic success. His own study of students in Hong Kong (1994) and Pulcini's (1997) study of Italian students witness that English learners in these societies tended to associate English with social and economic success, and they admired American

culture to some degree as they associated English with its culture. This finding also concurs with Kim's (2002) study of Korean English learners, who manifested the Americanization/ Westernization phenomenon in their socialization process as they developed perception on English in relation to educational and career success.

According to Kachru (1986), this attitude toward language among English learners in non-native English countries- English as a tool to access to social and economic power and prestige- plays a significant role not only in giving English its current powerful status but also in "creating 'identity' with the language and contributing to the belief in the 'alchemy' of English"(p. 137). Kachru (1996) also mentions that "the success story of English, its alchemy, and the resultant ecstasy, have unleashed a variety of issues related to identity, elitism, and toward perceptions of its users" (p.50). Such a trend is well documented in recent research studies on English education in the Korean context (e.g., Kim, 2002; Huh, 2004; Paik, 2005). Success in English is considered as a standard to measure Korean students' aptitudes, competencies and futures. English knowledge and educational credentials in the West have become a sign of intelligent people with elitist training (Roh, 2001). Consequently, such increasing power of English contributes to the market-oriented reality and commercialized human value in Korean learners' perception towards the world and themselves.

Many critical language theorists mentioned above point out that English as a global language and its educational practices have had a tremendous impact on native culture, and education. As the world become globalized through the notion of power whose ideology, values and beliefs are considered as norms, those who are not part of the dominant group are losing what they value and believe. Thus,

the role of English and its educational practices in the process of globalization need to be understood and examined in relation to its social, cultural, and ideological contexts and their profound implications on the construction of learners' certain types of cultural and social consciousness (Pennycook, 1994). From this perspective, this study attempts to critically examine Korean students' studying abroad/English process from the broad contexts of sociocultural and ideological issues and how the studying abroad process interplay with the students' identities.

Korean Overseas Students in Historical, Social, Cultural, and Ideological Contexts

In this section, I review the shifting historical, social and cultural background of Korean students since this contextual information would be helpful to understand identity issues related to Korean learners. I will first discuss Eastern Korean education culture and percepts of identity. Then the historical development of English/overseas education will be briefly reviewed in the context of Korean social and educational modernization and globalization processes.

Eastern Korean educational tradition and percept of identity

It is widely recognized that Confucianism has exerted strong influence on many countries of East Asia. As in many other Asian countries, Confucianism has endured as the dominant moral and educational philosophy/ religion in Korea, providing the structural principles and fundamental values for social institutions such as family and schools. Influenced by the Confucian tradition, investment in one's education has been considered as a virtue in Korea and the high value has

been given to one's formal education. This was because education was considered as a way of becoming an accomplished human beings in the Confucian tradition. Unlike today's educational trend which has become technical and commercialized (Bai, 2002), traditional Confucian philosophy held up the primary goal of education as the cultivation of humanity. In this tradition, becoming a whole person is a supreme educational achievement, and education is understood as a comprehensive art of life-long self-making. For Confucius, the cultivation of humanity is achievable through actually living the humane and responsible interpersonal relationships. Thus, Confucian education is featured as a holistic education, fundamentally committed to cultivation of the whole person who is fully integrated and harmonized with all social and natural orders of the world. (Hall and Armes, 1987).

Influenced by the Confucian ideal of education and its focus on communalism (Roh, 2001), Korean education is based on collectivism as opposed to the Western educational culture based on individualism. Thus, there are fundamental differences between East and West in the way they perceive self, other, and self-world relationships. In Eastern philosophy/ religious tradition, the way of identity quest is characterized as "non-dualism" in contrast with the Western way of dualism, which perceives reality as dichotomized or polarized between subject and object, matter and spirit, ultimate and immediate, self-others, and so on (Park, 1996). Park explains the difference as follows:

> Occidental thought has been haunted by the hosts of dualism. Its response has been to choose one pole of each dichotomy or the other or to assert both paradoxically or to seek a golden mean. From the oriental point of view, none of these are ultimate solutions, and there is no solution so long as the dualism is posited. A solution is to be found within the framework

> of the dualism. A solution must be a dissolution of the dualism, that is life in its wholeness before it is split between A and non-A. This is the fundamental meaning of the highest teaching of oriental thought: reality is non-duality (p. 130).

For instance, in Confucian tradition, the deepest meaning of *ren* (humanity) is the non-duality of self and other, and the cultivation of *ren* is the development of a non-dual relationship to the whole of life. Thus, quest of one's self is inseparable from the search for humanity, and the search for humanity is then the quest of non-dual reality. This, for Eastern thought, can not be grasped by the intellect alone but only with one's whole being. In this way, education becomes "a way of life" as one engages in the ceaseless life-practice of cultivating true humanity (Bai, 2002). Park further explains about Eastern view of education as the cultivation of the whole person as follows:

> For the Orient, the primary resource one has as a student is oneself, one's whole self, mind and spirit and body: unless one is willing to study with one's whole self, with everything one has, one is not really going to study at all. To penetrate oriental religious culture, all the student has and is must be brought to bear on all that this culture is, and the more complete the non-duality of student and subject matter, the greater is the depth and the deeper the truth of one's grasp it (p.8)

Although this Eastern traditional education culture and percept of identity went through much change during the process of modernization of Korean society/education and its contact with Western culture and ideologies, the Confucian legacy is still upheld in cultural ideals and percepts of human relationships in contemporary Korea (Hyun, 2001). The legacy persists in spite of the influence of other religions, such as Christianity on Korean culture (Malarcher, 2004).

The development of Korean education and Korean overseas students

The history of the modern school in Korea goes back to the early 1900s; however, the modern education system was established during the period of the U.S military government (1945-1948). Thus, the influence of the West/ U.S culture was significant in establishing the modern education system of Korea. Not surprisingly, Korean education development of modernization becomes synonymous with economic development of the society. According to Son (1990), Korea, like most postcolonial countries, could not resist the capitalistic modernization project based on the financial, technological, and market system of the West, after it gained a glamorized image of the West/U.S through their material superiority during the military government. Kim (1991) notes about the influence of U.S at this time as follows:

> During the period, the impact of the Americans' intensive control was so enormous that it deeply and lastingly permeated into almost every domain of Korean society. In fact the basic dominative political structures of Korean society established during the period of American military control has continuously been maintained without fundamental change. Besides, educational change during this period determined the ideological nature of contemporary Korean education. (p.3)

Naturally, during this time, the post-war Korean generation- which includes the parents of mine and my participants' in this study- internalized English language and culture as symbols of power, prosperity, and prestige. During the U.S-led reconstruction period, many vital governmental jobs were assigned to elite Koreans who had some connections to the U.S., those who obtained a higher education in the U.S, or were fluent in the English language (Paik, 2005). The knowledge of English language and culture became important cultural capital that had a strong link to socioeconomic attainment in Korea.

Subsequently, a large group of Korean students who represented the upper class of Korean society looked for overseas education opportunities, especially in the U.S; Son (1990) points out that, between 1953 and 1970, studying in the U.S comprised 80-90 % of all overseas education. Many of these elites who had their higher education degrees in U.S universities influenced the modernization process of the Korean education system (Rhee, 2002), and naturally English education has taken an important place in the school curriculum.

The modernization of the Korean education system has developed very fast since the military government. Due to Korean Confucian tradition which puts high value on education and the governmental commitment to develop the national education system and educated manpower, primary education became free as early as the mid 1960s. Also, secondary education has expanded continuously and thus, entrance to higher education has become increasingly competitive in today's Korea. It is not hard to find high school graduates who do *Jaesu* (studying one more year for university entrance exam) to enter into prestigious universities. The close link between academic achievement and socioeconomic status has consolidated the long standing belief in the values of elite education.

The Koreans' zeal for elite education also includes their enormous desire for English knowledge nowadays. In the 1980s, the interest in English increased as Korea hosted some international events (e.g., the 1986 Asian games and the 1988 Olympic games) under the *Kukjehwa* (internationalization) campaigns. As an attempt to internationalize, the Korean government deregulated overseas travel restrictions in 1989, which allowed increasing number of middle class Koreans to

have overseas experiences. Under these circumstances, transnational access and English knowledge continuously severed Koreans as class and status markers.

The interest and desire for English knowledge and overseas education have even more expanded in the 1990s as Koreans experienced various socioeconomic structural reforms under the banner of *Segyehwa* (globalization) campaign. Utilizing the globalization discourse, the government-led *Segyehwa* campaign emphasized the active participation of Korea into the global economy in order to enhance socioeconomic development of the country. Then, when the IMF financial crisis broke out in late 1997, the public realized more about increasing Korean dependency on the competitive global economy and U.S hegemony. In this process, English knowledge was considered as a signal to determine Korea's survival in the competitive global system and individual's access to the position of power and prestige in the Korean society. In current Korea, English language is often required in many academic and job opportunities and English proficiency is a great benefit for career mobility whether or not English ability is actually required for the job responsibilities. The pull of English has become so strong that it has resulted in a so called "English fever" in the society. The number of English kindergartens has increased and study abroad programs for elementary school students has become in high demand. For college students, study abroad programs for English have become popular or even mandatory requirement for graduation (Kim, 2002). *Uhak* (studying abroad) has become very appealing and a number of students are going overseas for language study or degree attainment. This time, it is not only to U.S, but also to other Anglo countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Kim, 2002).

According to Rhee (2002), despite the large number of students who go overseas, educational research on their lives and experiences especially from historical, social, ideological perspectives has been minimal. According to the report, over the decades, the number of Korean students in the West has been steadily increasing. In 2005, about 200,000 Korean students were studying abroad, representing the first largest group in the U.S and sixth largest group in Canada (www. goinglobal.com). Nonetheless, there has not been much effort to connect their lives and experiences to historical and current social, cultural contexts and values. Considering the number of Korean overseas students, and the relationship among language and cultural, ideological values and their interdependent roles in the process of identity de/re/construction of the students, further study is necessary to understand how current Korean students' studying abroad experiences are playing out in their identity de/re/construction process in which they are constantly engaged in construction of self based on historical and current personal, social knowledge produced by surrounding cultural, social and educational system. As such an attempt, this study tries to understand the dynamic trajectories of studying abroad process from the broad contexts of social, historical, cultural, educational surroundings that impact the students' lives and identity.

Chapter 3, Research Methodology

Interpretive Case Study

To conduct this study, I decided to do an interpretive case study because it best addresses the aim of the research study, which is to "understand" the experiences of Korean overseas students in regards to their cross-cultural/linguistic experiences and identity change. In this section, I account for the nature of interpretive inquiry and qualitative case study and how they fit with the purpose of this research project.

According to Merriam (2002), "qualitative researchers conducting an interpretive study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences"(p.36). This is closely connected to hermeneutics, which is about the work of understanding and interpreting human experience (Rorty, 1982; J. K. Smith, 1993). In fact, Ellis (1998) notes that any discussion of interpretive inquiry ought to start with key ideas of hermeneutics.

The central themes of hermeneutics include the question of understanding and creative activity of interpretation. According to Smith (1999a), in hermeneutic tradition, human understanding is seen to have its origin in the process of human life itself. That is, human understanding is a "category of life "in texts, artifacts, gestures, voices and we understand them to the degree to which we can show how they emerge from "lived experiences". And through a good interpretation, these experiences are connected to expression (p. 31). Thus, Ellis (1998) notes that, in interpretive inquiry, the researcher needs to work holistically with an effort to

discern the intent or meaning behind another's expression. Smith (1999a) also points out that good interpretation involves playing back and forth between the specific and the general, parts and wholes. The researcher constantly engages himself or herself in the question of "what is the big picture of which little things speak?" I found that this hermeneutic focus on the understanding of lived experience and creative interpretation was quite compatible with the purpose of this research project since I hoped to understand the lived experiences of Korean overseas students and to seek a holistic view of their studying abroad experiences and identity re/de/construction process. As I sought for deeper understanding of the issues involved in Korean overseas students' cross-cultural/linguistic lives and for a comprehensive interpretive account of it, I found that interpretive inquiry was appropriate for this research project.

Another reason I used an interpretive inquiry was its intersubjective perspective on human understanding. From the hermeneutic point of view, understanding is rooted in a sense of the dialogical, intersubjective and conversational nature of human experience (J. K. Smith, 1993; Smith, 1999a). According to Dilthey (1985), an important hermeneutical philosopher, human understanding is based on historical consciousness and learning to share/comprehend our different histories is vital for the understanding. Another famous hermeneutic scholar, Gadamer (1975) sees that understanding between people is possible only to the degree that people can initiate a conversation between themselves and bring about a "fusion" of their different horizons into a new understanding. Elaborating on Gadamer's conception of "horizons", Smith (2002a) describes hermeneutic research as follows:

> Research is best described as "conversation", out of which can be shown what it is we now have in common by virtue of having shared our horizons of understanding. Indeed, all understanding takes place in the context of a pre-given horizon, which serves as the basis upon which anything new can be registered and taken into consideration. Sometimes this is called the "fore- structure" of understanding. Gadamer also called it "prejudice" or "pre- judgment". When we meet, if we are to understand each other at all, somehow I have to open my horizon/ prejudice/ fore-structure to yours and vice versa (p.2).

In this way, Smith claims that hermeneutics is "horizon" research, examining the horizons of understanding that people bring to any situation. Thus, as Addison (1989) notes, in interpretive research, "a researcher's interpretation is a part of a co-constructive process in building meaning with participants" (p.42). This intersubjective nature of interpretive research has attracted me because I hoped to seek a fuller and collective understanding of the research questions by interacting with the different "horizons" of my participants. Also, I hoped that this study could be a very much shared experience affecting both my participants and me. In this dialogical orientation of interpretive inquiry, I believed that my pre-understandings of the research issue (presented in my autobiographical reflection) could serve as a good starting point, and then that, through a new form of engagement and dialogue with my participants, a new "fusion of horizons" would emerge and lead us to the deeper understanding of the research issues.

With regard to the nature of qualitative case studies, Merriam (1998) notes that case study is an intensive, holistic description of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, institution, person, process or social unit. According to her, case study can be characterized as three features: (1) particularistic: case study focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon; (2) descriptive: the end product of a case study is a rich, thick

description of the phenomenon under study; (3) heuristic: case studies illuminate the readers' understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, confirm what is known. (p. 29-30). Such features of case study knowledge were compatible with this study because this research intended to search for deep and rich understanding of concrete experiences of Korean overseas students in a particular context of cross-cultural experiences. Also I hoped that this study could contribute to advancing readers' understanding and knowledge of Korean overseas students.

Another aspect of case study that has attracted my attention was its focus on process and discovery. According to Yin (1994), case study design has a distinct advantage if the researcher is interested in "how" and "why" questions. He also notes that "if the researcher has less control over "a contemporary set of events" and if the variables are so embedded in the situation, a case study is likely to be the best choice" (p.9). In a similar vein, Merriam (1998) notes that a case study is interested in process (not in outcome), context (not in specific variables) and discovery (not in confirmation). In other words, "in case study, researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (p. 29). Merriam goes on to state that "case study helps us to understand the process of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object" (1998, p. 33). Such an outlook to research seemed particularly appropriate for this research project as I was deeply interested in understanding the "process" of Korean overseas students' identity (re)construction. Also, as I intended to "discover" the characteristics of

their studying abroad experiences and their effects on identification process, I found case study suitable for this research project.

Conversational Mode

In this interpretive case study, I employed conversation as a mode of doing research (Carson, 1986), examining the narratives of four Korean overseas students who have studied in Canada. My attraction to the conversational mode of inquiry is due to first, its capacity to illuminate people's experiences and expressing their identity. Sarup (1996) believes that identity cannot be separated from our stories and narratives. If we ask someone their identity, a story soon appears and this story usually implies the social dynamics of one's identity such as class, ethnicity, gender and religion. Polkinghorne (1988) points out that the question of identity –"who am I?" and "who are you?"- are not answered by simply attaching a predicate to the subject "I" as in " I am an student" and "I am a male". In everyday conversation, the answer takes a narrative form: "I was born in Korea. When I was twenty, I came to Canada..." and so on. Further, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) note that "narrative is a study of how humans make meaning of experience by telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p.24). In this regard, narrative functions as a way that individuals construct meaning and, through meaning, their own identity. Mishler (1986) also points out that stories are deeply connected to personal identities. He notes, "whatever story is about, it is also a form of self-presentation, that is, a particular personal-social identity is being claimed" (p. 243). That human beings have a natural propensity to express their identity in a

story form is one crucial reason why I chose conversation as a mode of this research project. As I hoped to understand the identity issues of Korean learners, stories of natural conversation seemed to be the most effective way to explore the lived experiences of my participants and their identification process.

Another reason for using the conversation mode was that it invites the researcher and participants to "interpersonal reasoning and caring" (Noddings, 1991). Ellis (1998) notes that narrative serves as a form of interpretative inquiry when it begins from concerned engagement and that it is this "concerned engagement" that distinguishes interpretive inquiry from those other forms of human inquiry. Witherell and Noddings (1991) note that:

> Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects...Telling and listening to stories can be a powerful sign of regard- of caring- for one another (1991, p. 280).

This has been attested in my experience with other Korean overseas students who had shared their cross-cultural/linguistic experiences with me. Telling and listening to their stories helped me to relate their experiences and ideas to my own as one human being to another. And this was what I wanted to do in my research - to be able to engage in interpersonal reasoning and caring through sharing stories and narratives. Smith (1999a) notes that:

> The mark of good interpretive research is not in the degree to which it follows a specified methodological agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what it is that is being investigated. And "understanding" here is itself not a fixed category but rather it stands for a deep sense that something has been profoundly heard in our present circumstances... we find ourselves, hermeneutically speaking, always in the middle of stories, and good hermeneutical research shows an ability to read those stories from inside out and outside in (p. 41-42).

Throughout this research, as an educational researcher, I hoped to practice this "profound hearing" and to attach myself to the storied nature of human experience. This, I believed, would provide both my participants and me with valuable opportunities to understand the meanings of our cross-cultural lives to the deep level and re-find ourselves. Thus, the narratives of natural conversation were encouraged in this research and that was an integral part of this study.

At it turned out, the nature of personal involvement and caring involved in conversational interview impacted this research much more than I imagined at the onset. Once I started interviews with my participants and our conversations went deeper over time, I personally got involved in the joy, concerns, fears, and loneliness of my participants so much that I often felt no boundary between what was and what was not for research, and no difference of my role between as a researcher and as a friend. My participants seemed to feel same way, so that they often forgot the tape-recorder and lost track of time while pouring out their hearts in our conversations. Times like this, that is, when we forget that "this is an interview" and simply relate to each other as one human being to the other, as Weber (1986, p.69) notes, the interviews have their best moments and the genuine dialogue takes place between researcher and the participants. Even though I was not always good at eliciting genuine dialogue, when I finished conversations with the participants each time, in most cases, I felt one step closer to them and they seemed to share same feeling. As such an evidence, one of my participant once expressed me, "I really like talking with you. It comforts me to share my stories with you". This kind of liking and mutual engagement in conversations in turn

helped me to explore the depth of my participants' identity to the extent this study did and made this research possible.

Research Process

Based on the research methodology described above, I designed research process as follows: First, I selected four participants and invited them to join this study project. Then after their consent was obtained, I conducted a series of conversational interviews with each participant over four months of data collection period. Data analysis was proceeded along with data collection in collaboration with the participants. When the data collection was completed, interview transcripts were reanalyzed and sorted into emerging themes. Drafts of each participant's narrative were written, the final one of which was delivered to the participants for verification and feedback. When their feedbacks were obtained, I revised the narrative according to their feedback, and incorporated their comments into the final text. Then, I identified common threads that run through four narratives and worked on synthetic and comprehensive interpretative account of the narrative findings. In the following section, I present in detail about each stage of research process.

Selection of Participants

In the beginning stage of this research, I had several criteria in mind regarding the selection of four participants for this project. First of all, an even mix of both males and females are desired to provide insights from both gender groups. The participants have to be Korean overseas students who have Korean as

their first language and English as their second language. They have to have lived in Canada for at least two years, which I thought (based on my own experience), is a sufficient time for them to be conscious enough of the research issues. Within that two-year period they must have studied at a Canadian educational institution as well. Another important criterion is that they have to be willing to share, in confidentiality, their experiences and thoughts related to the research inquiry. Finally, all participants have to be currently living in the Vancouver area for easy access for interviews.

As I wished, four Korean overseas students, two males and two females, participated in this study. I contacted four people individually between July and October, 2004. Three of them, Hyun, Samgi, and Heejin were the individuals whom I had known though the university or the church that I attended to, and Minji was the person whom I began to know through this research project. The following table provides more detailed information about the participants.

Table 1 Information about the participants

Participant	Gender	Age (interview time)	Arrival time to Canada	Education in Canada
Hyun	Male	32	1998	ESL & University(2000- 2004)
Samgi	Male	27	2000	ESL & College (2002-2004)
Heejin	Female	26	1999	ESL &University (2000-2006)
Minji	Female	22	2001	ESL & College(2005-present)

Data Collection

In this study, the primary means of data collection was an open-ended and in-depth "conversational" interviews with each participant. Each participant was interviewed at least four times, each interview lasting from one and a half to three hours over a four-month research period, from October, 2004 to January, 2005.

The interviews attempted to elicit the narratives and stories about participants' studying abroad experiences and how the experiences have interacted with their own identification process.

At the beginning stage of this research, I had designed an interview protocol to help participants to engage in various aspects of their experiences (such as affective, cognitive, evaluative aspects, and so on), and it was a useful process to think about how my research questions could be translated into detailed interview questions. However, I did not take this protocol to actual interviews because I pursued these interviews as an invitation to "conversation" (Carson 1986, Weber, 1986), thus interview questions need to be "open". Carson (1986) points out that conversational research is quite different from a conventional technical interview. While the latter involves an effort to gather information about perceptions or practices, the former implicates a revealing of something held in common. Then this shared, common understanding may generate new questions, providing a focus or reframed questions for the next inquiry. Therefore, as both Carson (1986) and Weber (1986) suggest, I tried to preserve the openness of question as a hermeneutical endeavor and to let the interviews questions and topics emerge by both participants and me.

During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to tell about their personal backgrounds, to reflect on their lives before and during their cross-cultural/linguistic experiences, and to share their anticipations for the future. They were also encouraged to relate their stories to the issues of identity. Usually during the first couple of interviews, participants shared about their major events of life stories, starting off with their childhood and school experiences,

circumstances surrounding their leaving Korea and their current experiences in Canada. In the later interviews, I went over their stories in the previous interviews, discussing each milestone of the individual's life in more detail. As I came to develop my conversations with each participant over time, I found that each participant's story came to cluster around a limited number of themes, which appeared repeatedly in the later conversations. According to Sarup (1996), this is the essence of our identity: Some things matter more to each of us than others. By the end of interviews, I came to have an overall picture of a set of themes for each participant.

All the interviews were audio-taped. For the first couple of interviews, both my participants and I were sometimes conscious of the tape-recorder, but soon after we became less conscious about the machine. I always placed the recorder near my participants and told them to turn it off whenever they would like to do, but they hardly did it. After each interview, I listened to the tape and made summary transcripts of the conversation, through which I identified key expressions or points to explore further in next conversations. Later when the data collection was completed, I transcribed all the interviews with four participants and provided a copy to each participant.

In addition to the formal interviews, I also had informal gatherings or conversations with each participant as often as I could. Carter, Donald & Squies (1993) note that, in order to study some people' sense of place and identity, it is necessary to hang around with them and attend to them as experiencing subjects. Thus, I was willing to spend time with the participants as much as possible. As for Hyun, Heejin, and Samgi, this kind of informal gatherings came naturally as I

was involved with same church programs with Hyun and Heejin, and as I lived next door to Samgi. Regarding Minji, as we had no common social life, I made a special effort to hang around with her by arranging informal meetings or occasions every week for the first two months. However, later as Minji and I came to build closer relationships, our informal gatherings came just as naturally and casually as the ones with other participants. After those informal contacts, with my participants' consent, I took notes of whatever caught my attention: not only what we discussed, but also their remarks in the conversations with others, and my questions and tentative interpretations, and so on. Reinharz (1992) points out that this kind of "nonstandard information", which is revealed in daily episodes, small chats, and observations is a valuable resource to disclose the embedded feelings and intentions that are hidden or taken for granted by the participants. Indeed, the informal conversations that I had with each participant served as a useful guide for new or deeper insights about our formal interview topics. Further, when I worked on writing the narratives of each person, the memories and records of those informal gatherings became much more valuable source of inspiration than I had anticipated during the data collection period.

Data Analysis

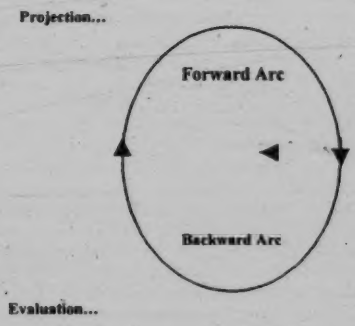
In qualitative research, as Merriam (2002) notes, data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection. Ellis (1998) also points out that, in interpretive inquiry, the interpretation is directed and guided by the concerns researchers bring to the question and the human solidarity they seek through the inquiry. Thus, the data analysis and interpretation process in interpretive research

cannot be pre-structured as sequential steps because it is essentially a circulatory process. John Smith (1993) points out that:

> The interpretation of meaning can only be pursued with a constant movement back and forth between the expression and the web of meaning within which that expression is embedded. In that this process allows for no natural or non-arbitrary starting or ending points, it is best thought of in terms of a circle- a condition most often referred to as the hermeneutic circle (p. 187).

As for the hermeneutic circle, Ellis provides a visualizing account of it as follows:

The Hermeneutic Circle (Ellis, 1998, p.27)



Entails making sense of a research participants, situation, or a set of data by drawing on one's forestucture which is the current product of one's autobiography (beliefs, values, interests, interpretive frameworks) and one's relationship to the question or problem (pre-understanding and concerned engagement).

Entails endeavoring to see what went unseen in the initial interpretation resulting from projection. The data are re-examined for contradictions, gaps, omissions, or confirmations of the initial interpretation. Alternate interpretive frameworks are purposefully searched for and "tried on"

With this nature of interpretive accounts in mind, the data analysis and interpretation of this study was conducted throughout and after the data collection based on the hermeneutic circle. The data analysis began right after the first interview. From the second interview on, data collection and analysis were proceeded side by side, the two processes increasingly intertwined over time. At the suggestion of Merriam (1998), I first summarized interview tapes after each conversation and this summarizing process turned out to be a preliminary data

analysis task. What I learned and interpreted initially from each summary transcript then directed or guided our next conversations as I attempted to seek confirmations, contradictions, or gaps of the initial information and interpretations. In the early stage of data collection, analysis consisted of identifying key points or words and letting the participants elaborate on them. Later, as the conversations went on, it turned into a more interpretative process, identifying and discussing important themes for each participant and common recurring themes across the participants.

At the end of the data collection, I transcribed all the interview tapes in order to pay closer attention to participants' exact words and expressions. After filing each participant's transcripts and interview notes in a separate folder, I took out one participant's file at a time, reread each file several times and worked on data coding. I started to sort the data according to the themes that emerged in the conversations with each participant. Then the themes were analyzed and grouped into the larger unit of several contexts, which reflects the temporal sequence of experiences: (1) In Korea, Before Foreign Journey, (2) In Canada, During Cross-Cultural Experiences, and (3) Future Anticipation. In this way, I believed I could develop each narrative showing the participant's identity change process across time and space effectively. By the time I completed coding, I had a clearer sense of themes that were critical to each person and overall picture of each narrative.

Writing Process

When I worked on writing each participant's narrative, I soon realized that the writing was another form of data analysis and interpretation. Experiencing the

forward and backward arcs of the hermeneutic circle by re-examining a constant set of data with different perspective and insights, I strove to develop the most accountable narrative for each participant.

Fine (1994) argues that qualitative researchers need to "work the hyphen of self and other" at which researchers recognize their entangled and multiple identities with their participants, resisting to distance and cut them out as "others" (p.72). Indeed, in the process of developing each narrative, I am reminded that,

> In qualitative research, researchers are chronically and uncomfortably engaged in ethical decisions about how deeply to work with /for those cast as others, and how seamlessly to represent the hyphen. Our work will never arrive but must always struggle between (Fine,1994, p.75).

In developing each narrative, I found myself always be in some relation to this kind of struggle, striving towards "working the hyphen" between my own subjective perceptions and participants'. My prior knowledge and subjective perceptions that I gained through my own experience as an international student and through personal relationships with participants seemed to work both positively and negatively: The positive aspect was that they enabled me to immerse myself into their world and to understand subtle nuances and meanings of their words or expressions, which might be incomprehensible for those who do not have shared experiences and personal relationships; The negative aspect was that there was always a risk of reading too much meaning into their words. Thus I needed to strive to keep and bring the balance to my participants' stories.

As an effort to "work the hyphen" and to make my narrative writings more accountable, after writing each narrative, I sent it to each participant and asked for his or her feedback on it. In asking their feedback, I requested them to comment

on several points: factual errors, interpretation they do or do not agree with; any information they want to add or delete; any general comments or overall feelings about reading their stories. I gave each participant whatever time they needed for reading and reflecting on the narratives. When their feedback came in, I revised each narrative according to their suggestions. It, however, turned out to be quite a minor revision since most of my participants came up with just a few factual correction or addition/ deletion of some informative data. Regarding interpretative accounts or overall content of the narrative, the participants generally showed their agreements to or satisfactions with them. Although the process of getting feedback from my participants did not make much difference in the narrative texts, I found the process satisfactory as it helped not only the narrative texts become more accountable but also the research process become more dialogical, reflecting the nature of this inquiry.

After developing each narrative, I worked on more collective or synthetic interpretation of the narrative findings. Wolccott (1994) notes that "the effective story should be specific and circumstantial, but its relevance in a broader context should be apparent and its implication should be broad" (p.98). Thus, I tried to identify common threads that run through across narratives and discuss how the insights found in common themes can contribute to collective knowledge in the relevant education field. In this process, the narrative chapters were reanalyzed as a whole text in order to render the most coherent and comprehensive interpretations of the findings.

With regard to an interpretive account, it is noteworthy that this study is looking for not validated knowledge, but a more comprehensive understanding of

the research questions. Packer and Addison (1989) note that, when evaluating an interpretive account, validity is not the issue in terms of proving an interpretation true or false. Instead, they suggest, the real question is whether the interpretive account can be clarified or made more comprehensive. In a similar vein, Ellis (1998) also cautions that, to evaluate an interpretive account, one should ask whether the concern which motivated the inquiry has been advanced, rather than to ask whether it has provided validated knowledge or timeless truth. With this perspective in mind, I tried to seek more holistic and comprehensible interpretations that would contribute to advancing our understanding of this research inquiry.

PART TWO

NARRATIVES: CASE ANALYSES

Chapters Four to Seven present the narratives of four participants' cross-cultural experiences. The unique experience of each participant's story is presented according to its emerging themes. Each case is organized into four sections: (1) Introduction; (2) In Korea, Before Foreign Journey; (3) In Canada, During Cross-Cultural Experiences; (4) Future Anticipation.

Chapter 4, Hyun

Introduction

I was fortunate in that Hyun was my first participant. He was a natural thinker and good communicator. Being a contemplative person, he was also quite good at sharing his ideas and thoughts with others in an open and honest manner. Whenever I finished interviews with him, I remember telling myself how grateful I was to have had conversations that were based on such openness and mutual engagement.

In fact, the relation of openness and honesty I have shared with him is not a recent one. I have known him for quite a few years since our first encounter in Vancouver in the year of 1998. At that time, just beginning my new life in Canada, I was visiting a Korean church to seek a Korean community in which I could speak my mother tongue and find some fellowship. Lonely and stressed out with the English only speaking environment after two months in an unfamiliar city and campus, I was standing there by a church fellowship table waiting for someone to talk to me. And there he was! Suddenly he came out of the crowd and welcomed me delivering some familiar Korean greeting, which I missed badly at the time. After a few minutes' talk, knowing the fact that we were the same age and that we had gone to the same university in Korea provided some sense of bond between us and good enough reasons to seek further fellowship. Since then, we have been good friends to each other. Attending the same church and later living as neighbors in the same residence building on UBC campus, we have known and watched the high and low points in each other's *uhak* (studying abroad) lives in

Vancouver. Even after I left Vancouver for Edmonton or Korea, he remained in a circle of friends group with whom I have stayed in touch and in which we have shared the joyful and depressing events of one another's life.

Later as my plans for this research project matured, his name naturally came up in my mind as a possible research participant. Not only did he meet the criteria of participant selection, but also was he one of the friends who gave me incentive for this study by telling me about the many interesting aspects of his *uhak* life. Also being a contemplative person, Hyun seemed to be a perfect person for this study, which required participants' active reflection and interpretations of their own experiences. When I invited him to participate in this study, I had faith in him being a comfortable and cooperative participant in this study, and he always was.

In Korea, Before Foreign Journey

Studying Abroad: In Search of Better Self- Identity

Hyun left Korea in 1998 at the age of 26. When he left for Canada, he had an agenda in his mind: Mastering English within three months in order to prepare himself better for a competitive Korean job market. Upon departing Korea, he had no intention of staying in Canada for more than three months. His plan was to come back home with improved English abilities after three months of studying and to start job-hunting again. In fact, prior to departure, he had just been turned down by a company where he applied for a job position and he needed to make up the failure soon:

> During my military service, I worked for a computer company and I loved my job there. After finishing my army service, I wanted to get a job at better company, but I failed to get one. At the time, my parents suggested me having a trip to Vancouver with them. Having thought that I deserved some break after three years army service, they encouraged me to take some rest at Vancouver. I accepted their suggestion and decided to visit Vancouver for three months. I thought I could take some ESL programs and keep job searching through internet while taking some break there. Also I was curious to know the country where I was born.

To help readers' understanding, two things need to be explained here: Hyun's birthplace and Korean military service system. Regarding his birthplace, Hyun has a unique background. He was born in Toronto in 1972 when his father, who was working for a major Korean company, was transferred to its Toronto branch in Canada. So Hyun was a Canadian citizen technically, only one among my participants. However, as he went back to Korea at the age of two and spent his whole life in Korea until his first trip to Vancouver at the age of 26, he firmly considered himself as a Korean citizen as well. As a matter of fact, his affirmation of himself as a Korean is well demonstrated by the fact that he did his military service in Korea. As a Canadian citizen technically, he could have avoided the Korean military service requirement if he had wanted to. Yet, he had no plan to leave Korea at the time, so he performed his military service, which was required of all Korean citizen men. Later when his life-plan was revised and he decided to stay in Canada, his performance of military served as kind of an "indulgence" for his keeping Korean nationality, he said:

> I am aware of that, in Korea, people like me are required by law to notify the birthplace to the government office by the age of 18 and to decide which nationality to keep for the rest of life. However, as I did not do it, I have naturally remained and lived as a Korean citizen. I think that the fact that I had finished my military service could serve as an "indulgence" for my holding two citizenships. The primary reason our government prohibits holding two citizenships is to keep people from getting away from the duty

> of military service through the use of a permanent residence right in another country. However, as long as I completed my duty, it seems that they (government officers) don't really concern about my holding two citizenships. In my opinion, it doesn't matter to them as far as I had done my share.

In Korea, everyman over 20 years of age is required to do a compulsory military service by law. While some people may associate the service with an image of a group of army, uniforms or military training, the Korean military service is not limited to the service of active duty enlistment. It ranges over a variety of types of service such as active duty enlistment, time reserve enlistment, conscription public duty personnel service, expert research personnel and industrial technical personnel service. Depending on the applicants' medical conditions, needs, and education background, the government appoints them different requirements (from www.mnd.go.kr). As a graduate with an engineering major, Hyun performed an industrial technical personnel service. That meant that he worked for a computer-related company for about three years. He said he loved his job there. Hardworking and steadfast, he was even offered a job interview by one of the top computer companies in Korea at the last stage of his army service. Thinking that there might be a better opportunity for him in the near future, he turned down the offer with little hesitation. Yet, by the time he finished his army service, he faced the bleak job situation in Korea. His job application was rejected.

In such a situation, the suggestion of Vancouver trip from his parents sounded very timely. He thought to himself, "I will invest some time in English study there. After all, English is the most important tool to land at good company in a Korean society…In fact, a good job meant a lot to me in those years," he said. It sounds quite natural that finding a job is one of the most significant concerns

for new university graduates, yet in Hyun's case, it meant more than merely finding a job. It meant finding a place where he could feel a sense of self-esteem, that is, his self-identity, to use his words:

> I believe that one's identity is strongly related to one's self- respect and self-esteem. In that respect, I can say that my identity at the time was heading to the bottom... I had never felt competent about myself before I started to work for a company. I used to be very pessimistic about myself and to suffer a sense of inferiority in terms of my educational background. In most cases, I always considered myself as "*monnani*".

Monnani has no exact equivalent in English but can be translated as "bad-looking" as opposed to "good- looking". In Korea, when one is described as *monnani*, it can literally mean the person is bad looking, or metaphorically the person is lacking good abilities or short of some important qualities. It, in fact, was an important word in defining Hyun's identity in Korea in terms of his educational and familial life. As will become clear in the next section, due to his family and education background, Hyun used to have a strong inferior complex until he worked for a company during the military service years. He said, "I loved to work for the company. Why? Because I was being approved and recognized by people there. It hardly happened before. I enjoyed working". Considering the situation, the failure in job hunting was probably a very hard occasion for Hyun, which reminded him of his *monnani* identity and his inner bitterness about it. He was eager to find employment again with a major company, and for that reason he felt a need to improve his English ability. He said:

> English had been a big burden in my life in Korea. I used to go to private English institutes to learn English. Yet, in my workplace, I often had a difficulty in comprehending English texts. My English is terrible... I had such a burden in my mind for a long time.

He was well aware that two qualifications are essential to land a job at major companies in Korea: a high English proficiency test score such as on TOEFL or TOEIC and the experience of studying English abroad[7]. Therefore, Hyun decided to take this trip as an opportunity to improve his English and to get an experience of studying abroad, which is essential for his future job-hunting and thus for his sense of better self- identity.

Along with his concerns about English and a career, there is another thing that motivated his Vancouver trip: His deep curiosity and admiration for the West. He recalled:

> In my childhood, I think I really had a big admiration for West. About U.S and Canada, I remember hearing only good things about it. Through the media like TV and movies, it was seen to me as a country of wealth and prosperity. Also as it is Korean society that recognize people who had an education in the West.

Besides, the stories he heard from his parents about the country was good enough to promote his image of Canada as a dreamland:

> They (my parents) used to tell me a lot of good things about Canada- which made me appreciate and even be proud of the fact that I was born there... the fact that I hold a Canadian citizenship. Even though my experience was limited in Korea, the impression I got about Canada from my parents was greatly influential to me.

He never felt Canada was a foreign county even though he did not have a chance to visit Canada until he finished his army service. His sense of belonging to Canada has been cultivated by his parents as well as the culture around him that privileges Western education, providing better job opportunities and social respect. Thus, later when his parents suggested the Vancouver trip, there was no reason for him to refuse it. He left for Canada in March of 1998.

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[7] It is well known in Korea that the job application forms of major companies include the section which inquires about the applicants' experience of studying English abroad and their English score.

Monnani Identity

In our first interview, when I asked Hyun how he would describe himself in Korea, he responded, "I think the way I was had been greatly shaped by my father whom I lived with all my life until I came to Canada." I nodded my head in agreement. During his first couple of years in Vancouver, I had seen that the influence of his father was powerfully disposing his way of life. The influence he got from his father throughout his childhood and adolescence was, in Hyun's explanation:

> I think I was a kind of person who always saw a negative side of things. Growing up with my strict father, who was well educated and successful in his career, I often felt I was not fully meeting the expectations he had for me... Every time I experienced that, I considered myself as "*monnani*". I was filled with the ideas such as 'I am nobody... I can't do anything right'. However, I don't think that there were only negative influences from him. Positively, under strong- willed father, I learned how to lead a disciplined and diligent life... also, honesty and obedience.

Talking about his father, I was reminded that his father was a graduate of the Seoul National University, which is generally regarded as the most prestigious university in Korea. Growing up in a society where the identity of people is closely tied with the educational background and the name of the school they go to, I could easily assume about Hyun's father's high self-esteem and elitist way of life. Although university education is very common in today's Korea, as far as I know, in Hyun's parents' generation, it was very rare to meet a person with a university degree. Even high school education was something people would look up to with admiration and high respect. More than that, working as a promising executive at one of the major companies in Korea, Hyun's father had a prestigious experience of having worked abroad in Toronto, North America. Given that it

happened in the early seventies, when most Koreans had a sort of "American dream", it is not difficult to guess how much of a sense of elitism he must have had throughout his lifetime. An example of such elitism is detectable in Hyun's father's return to Korea after a few years in Toronto. Hyun said, when Hyun's parents were in Canada working for a Toronto branch, they could have remained in Canada if they wanted. And it was pretty in common those days for employees who were once transferred to a foreign country, especially North America, to stay and lead a new life in their dreamland. However, to many people's surprise, Hyun's parents decided to go back to Korea, no matter how much they loved Canada. Hyun's assumption was:

> My father must have preferred high social standing he had in Korea. He could see no vision of success in this foreign country as much as he could in Korea. That must be why he decided to go back... for the sake of social success.

It seemed that Hyun's father wanted his son to pursue such a successful career path much like his own through entry into a prestigious university to a secure job with a major company. To prepare his son for a top university, since Hyun was a middle school boy, he had placed Hyun into one of the best school districts in Seoul, so called *palhakgoon*. *Palhakgoon* can be translated as "eight districts of good learning". It was formed along rich districts in Seoul, along the districts of several secondary schools, which are well known for their optimum schooling conditions preparing students for the entry into prestigious universities. Although Hyun's parents expected that the school would provide their son with quality environment for his education, it turned out quite opposite in terms of his fragile ego:

> From an objective point of view, I was given the best schooling condition, but if you take a closer look at the reality of school life there, there was so much gap between high-grade students and low-grade students...They were treated so differently. From that kind of experience, I think, I got the wrong idea. Consciously or unconsciously, the idea that the high-grade students are better people than low-grade students had deeply crept in me. In my case, when school divided classes for high-grade students and low-grade students, I went back and forth to both sides of class. I was traveling between the sense of superiority and that of inferiority all the time. I think that made me quite sensitive about how other people think of me rather than how I consider myself.

As quiet and serious boy as he was, the secondary school experience made him more serious and pessimistic about himself. The thought that he was *monnani* got even stronger as he often faced his father's negative feedback or disapproval on his school performance:

> When my school grades dropped, it was not unusual for me to get punished by my father. In most cases, I felt that I was not meeting my father's expectations in whatever I did. For example, in terms of English study, I remember that one day my father had me read English textbook in front of him. By then I was a junior high school student, just beginning to learn English. He scolded me for having such a bad pronunciation and poor reading skill. That discouraged me a lot and since then English became nothing but a burden to me.

It seemed that this experience of his led him to a severe inferiority complex and an extreme idea occasionally: "In secondary school days, I often thought about suicide. Very often... as I was discouraged and depressed all the time. I was a quiet person both home and at school." Although he was a quiet and obedient boy, it did not mean that he was just accepting his father's authority without any resistance. Hyun's rebellion against his father was expressed to his mother throughout his puberty, he said. However, his mother's sympathetic appeal and his father's strong authority were powerful enough to control every small action of his rebellion.

Culture and tradition, embodied by our parents, constrain the range of life stories we can choose to live out. Their lives serve us as models, positively or negatively and their expectation and education predispose us in a certain direction. Growing up with a successful and strong willed father, Hyun learned in his early age about the social prestige of being a graduate of top universities, and how much disciplined life is required to achieve it:

> I think I had been hard-working student both at home and at school. However, although I spent a lot of time in front of desk at home, I was just pretending to study, rather than doing real study. From secondary school to even university, I think I did my study not for my own dream or wish, but for my parents.

Although he went after his parents' dream, not his own, it was clear that his parents' wishes and way of life turned out to be a powerful undercurrent in his own life. For instance, Hyun recalled:

> In my junior high school days, I remember being asked by one of teachers about my future dream. When he asked, 'what do you want to be when you grow up?', most of my friends responded, 'doctor' , 'president', 'lawyer'. I was different. I said, 'I will work for the company'...Well, I am not sure whether working for a company was my real dream or not at that time. Perhaps I wanted to pop up by saying different thing or maybe because of my father's influence... Anyway, later, in university, it became my specific goal and plan. Then I studied hard and finished university and worked for a company to fulfill military service requirement. However, the way I was at that time ... I do not think I had my own special dream or life goal at the time. I think I was just living according to the social norm ...following the conventional path most Korean men pursue.

By the social norm or conventional path, Hyun implied sort of Korean middle-class culture, in which man is supposed to achieve certain accomplishments by a certain age. For example, in Korea, it is often conventionally considered as a successful life if a man was able to go to a top university and then to get a secure job in his twenties at the latest and then to get married and purchase his own

house before he reaches his mid-thirties. Throughout my conversations with Hyun, I noticed that these age-appropriate accomplishments remained as important criteria in terms of his perception of himself. And in the context of a competitive collectivistic culture, accomplishments are always compared to those of one's peers. By the time he was working for a company, Hyun felt that he was running on the conventional path faster than his peers were:

> If I compare my life with that of my age group friends at the time, I thought I was far ahead of others. (in terms of my education and work experience) I was quite faster than others- I started school one year earlier than others. Besides, I worked for a company as a performance of my military service, which gave me an opportunity to earn money and to gain some social experience at the same time. Already standing on my own feet, while most of my peers were still in university and independent financially, I felt that I was much faster than others. Also I had a girlfriend, and was taking graduate program… I thought I had done and doing many things in a short period time, which might take many years for others. So I thought I was going faster than other friends.

However, no matter how fast he felt he was running ahead on the conventional life path, he knew in his heart that his accomplishment was not to his father's full content and to his own either. The fact that he was not a graduate of a prestigious university was one crucial reason of such sense of dissatisfaction: "I was not satisfied with my educational background and I had an inferior complex toward to the top university graduates… I always saw myself as someone with lack," he said. Although he could make up for such lack with his diligence and hard work at his workplace, it was temporal. When he was out of employment at the end of military service, he was forced to face his fragile *monnani* identity again. English ability and experience of studying abroad seemed to be the best way to compensate his lack.

In Canada, During Cross-Cultural Experience

From a Short Sojourn to an Extended Stay

When Hyun first came to Vancouver, he realized that things were very different than he anticipated:

> When I first got here, I felt so much difference... people, environment, language, they are much different than I thought. I realized that hand-on experience was quite different from indirect experience, I mean, my head-knowledge about Canada.

He enjoyed this difference in the beginning of his Vancouver life. From a visitor's point of view, difference is something one can afford to enjoy. However, as months went by, the different reality he faced in terms of his English study started to turn his enjoyment to an irritation. He came to realize that his English was not improving as fast as he expected and that three months was no enough time to achieve his goal.

By then, he had become aware of the possible advantages he could get as a Canada-born citizen in Vancouver. For instance, he learned that he was eligible to work in Canada. With his work experience in the field of computer technology, which was in the time of a boom in the Vancouver job market, he happened to be offered an interview by a Canadian company, which he came to know through a career fair. Not surprisingly enough, the interview turned out as a disaster:

> I was scratching other's leg. It made me realize my real English limit ... After the experience, I decided to extend my stay in Canada. I thought that I should go to a regular school rather than ESL school. I felt need to experience an educational system here... However, the most influential factor that changed my plan was my experience with KOSTA conference[8]

[8] KOSTA (KOrean STudents in America) is a Korean Christian convention that holds every year for Korean international students in North America. The convention has been held in 20 different cities of North America since 1986 with the purpose of building Korean leaders based on Christian worldview.

> in 1998. Because of the challenges and vision I saw at the conference, I decided to pursue my study here. I believe that it was the most influential factor that made me stay here.

The challenge he got from KOSTA, which I learned from later conversations with him, was "becoming a man of vision, an influential person who can serve as a raw model to others". He recalled the experience:

> In Korea, I just followed the way how others live... work, girlfriend... as my life was controlled by the busy life there, such words like dream or vision never came my way... But at KOSTA, they talked a lot about it. About vision and dream...They not only challenged me to have one but also modeled it through their lives... through the way they were.

When he mentioned this, I could understand what he meant. Through my own experience with KOSTA, I can say that it is almost impossible not to be challenged or stimulated by those who speak there- KOSTA speakers are usually well-known Christians, who are highly respected and successful professionals in their respective fields (medical, education, business, international ministry, and so on). With their professional success on the one hand and their sincere religious life on the other, most of them are leading exemplary lives that most Korean Christian *uhaksaengs* look up to and wish to follow. Even to non-Christians, I am sure that the speakers' professional success is something of their admiration. In Hyun's case, the inspiration he got from them was so great that it was often brought up in our conversations.

It seemed that his experience at KOSTA was a turnaround point in his life. He became no longer a person who lives up to his father's expectations with his ambivalent desire to meet them. He came to have his own goals and vision, that is, to become a successful professional and to become an influential being. In fact, the word "success" was the theme brought up most frequently in our

conversations, and I gradually learned it was the most vital word used in his defining self-identity. As I become aware of the weight of this word in Hyun's cross-cultural lives, I wondered why the people whom he met at KOSTA appealed to him so much that the word "success" suddenly began to take on a positive connotation in his stories. As a matter of fact, the issue of success was already there as a big concern in his life in Korea, and he had a powerful model of a successful career in his whole life – that is, his father. Yet the issue was a negative and pressing force to him in Korea. My assumption was that the change in his perception was attributed to the different way of how social success was presented to him in each respective place. In Korea, success was something he always had to strive to hold in order to prove his worth in the eyes of others. It was always something that tells him who is superior and who is inferior. Yet, at KOSTA, he realized that success was not a mere criterion of proving one's self or weighing one's worth. It seemed that he found its meaning beyond such a self-centered perspective.

University Preparation: Identity Struggle

After Hyun decided to extend his stay, he worked on university admission right away. After some research, he knew which university he wanted to pursue and what major he wanted to take: Three universities in the Vancouver area attracted his attention and he had definitely computer science in his mind. With the strong inspiration he got from KOSTA and with the exciting exploration into a different educational culture ahead of him, he was full of hope and energy during the first a few months of his extended study.

However, it did not take long before he realized that this new language and cultural environment were not always exciting. As months went by, the limit of his English ability became more apparent to him. When he decided to extend his stay, he expected that one-year of English study would give him enough time to obtain sufficient TOEFL score- a key requirement for university admission, and that he could start campus life by the following September. Yet, the expectation seemed too far unrealistic whenever he came back from TOEFL tests. It was by this time that I first met Hyun and my memory about him those days reminds me of how often he fell into a depression. One year for English and TOEFL score extended to another six months. And another six months dragged into another year. By this time most of us in his friend group became very concerned about his depression. As quiet a person as he was, he became more quiet and often appeared to be absent-minded in social gatherings with Korean friends.

Along with his awareness of his limited English ability, Hyun also felt that he was stuck in an environment where the opportunities of English speaking were quite limited as he got used to Vancouver life. With a high population of Korean international students and of other ethnic groups in Vancouver, he found that there were not many opportunities to practice his English outside of school. The opportunities he was able to speak English, at best, were through busy ESL teachers at the ESL institute and some other Chinese or Japanese friends there. I remember once his telling a joke going around among many Korean international students at ESL institutes: "with more years in Vancouver, the more improving Korean, the more declining English, the more intervening Chinese". A joke as it might be, this cynical expression describes well the typical situation many ESL

international students experience in the Vancouver context. Hyun was not exceptional to the situation, which seemed more irritating to him as he had a strong desire to be integrated into English speaking contexts.

Whatever reasons kept him so long in university preparation time, it seemed that the repeated failures in acquiring a desired TOEFL score and prolonged status outside of school became a formidable challenge to his sense of self-esteem, especially because it meant that he had no place to belong to. He grew up in a society, which equates one's identity with the school or organization one belongs to. Being in between schools or jobs is one of the most difficult statuses, which forces one to feel like he or she becomes nobody. This must have been more distressing to Hyun as the situation was bitterly going in the opposite direction, in contrast to his strong desire to become a somebody or an influential being. The situation also began to remind him of his old-seated inferiority complex and to throw doubt upon his ability. Later when Hyun shared me some of his journal entries in the interview, I found this entry expressing his mind at the time:

> The way I am now... is this okay? My confidence is shaking... I realize that I am being too sensitive to how others see me. I am captured by their looks in many important situations... I am losing faith in me, the faith in my ability. In this lost, the things of darkness (inferior complex and distrust) are sneaking in my deeper being.

More than two years have passed since he came to Vancouver. His application to BCIT (British Columbia Institute of Technology) was turned down two times in the meantime. Most of his friends empathized with his subsequent failures and on-going identity struggle.

Spiritual Life: a Source of Self- Recovery

During this tough time of struggle, there was a place that would restore in Hyun a sense of self-trust whenever he suffered from bleak self-doubt and *monnani* identity: the church. Since he was in grade two, he and his whole family have attended church every Sundays. However, in Korea, even though he grew up going to the church all his life, the church did not play much in his life and his perception of self, he said. Yet, with his steadfast participation in the church, he always had a strong membership to his home church. In his fourth year in university, he became a representative of a college group in the church, but his "*monnani*" identity soon played at the time. He resigned from the position in the midway, convincing himself, "I am not good enough for this".

However, there was one flashing moment that the church and his spiritual life offered him a sanctuary when his self- image was the most negative in Korea:

> In university, I once joined a big retreat program held by a Christian student organization. The retreat program consisted of three-day conference and a week- mission trip to some remote areas of south province. I was hesitant to join the mission trip, but one of my seniors twisted my arm to join it. However, on the first day of the trip, while walking along the country road, I was glad that I had joined it. The beautiful scenery of country unfolded before my eyes were so beautiful that I still can't forget it. Then one clear afternoon, my team was visiting a family in the village. After having shared a gospel with them and enjoyed the food they treated us, we were about to leave, saying good- bye to them. At that moment, I happened to see myself through the mirror that was hung on the wall of the house. Right at the moment, I am surprised to see myself. For the first time of my life, I found myself "beautiful" (laugh). The figure reflected in the mirror was very different from the image I had for myself. It looked holy… and beautiful (laugh).

When recalling this memory, Hyun did so with a hint of nostalgia and vivid description, so I could sense how strong an impression it had left on him. "It was one of rare moments that I found my positive-self in Korea," he said.

Later when he came to Vancouver and his identity struggle was severe during the university preparation time, his spiritual life began to play a bigger role in his perception of himself than ever before. It became a constant source of self-recovery, a recovery from his own bitterness from the past and from his self-doubt those days. Many of his journal entries at the time, which was written in the form of prayers and meditation showed this process of recovery:

> Before I truly accepted you (God), my life was filled with worries and concerns. Through the period of my childhood and teen age years, many hurt and bitterness engraved in me. As I did not know you, I came back and forth between light and darkness, leaving many scars in my mind. However, as I came to know you more now, I do not have to stick to the darkness of the past and there is no reason to leave the bitterness in my heart. You are healing me through the times of prayers and I thank you for that. Locking myself up in the memories of past is no good to me. Time to move on…The vision I got from you… I want to keep it and achieve it.
> A faith in myself… I often lose it. Yet God moves me and leads me to look up to Him more. I remember your word of "Be patient". I want to see things more deeply with your perspective… not with my perspective or ability.

While reading his journals, it intrigued me that the process of his self-recovery is closely related to the vision he mentioned in our conversations. His spiritual alignment trained him to re-see and nourish his vision, which he believed was granted by God, thus empowering him to fight against the attack of self-doubt. Despite his subsequent failures in university admission, he was able to control himself not to remain as a captive of an inferiority complex but to move on with a positive outlook: In his journal, he noted that he considered his failures as a process of rebuilding himself to become a more humble and mature person.

The process of self-recovery also included his realization that his English learning should be just a means for his vision, but not an end in itself. He shared:

> I remember pastor Cho. Once I was greatly challenged by him. He speaks little English, but he seemed to have no fear for speaking with foreigners. I lived here longer than he. From an objective point of view, my English was better than his...Yet I was still not able to communicate with foreigners. Then I wondered what gave him such courage to speak out. I realized that he had a passion to share a gospel with Canadians in English. To me, the language played too big role in me, so that the fear for language mistakes was controlling me. However, to him, the language was just means, not ends itself. So he was able to communicate well. Such experience taught me that English is an important means of communication, but it should not be my objective.

Since then, Hyun has tried hard to recover his owner-ship of learning and to become a more active subject of English learning. The church life offered him a constant motive and energy when he was struggling most with his fragile identity. Against the self-doubt or fear he felt during his university preparation time, his spiritual life kept him moving on with patience.

University Life

Language and Identity Struggle

I still remember the phone conversation I had with Hyun on one clear spring day in 2000. I leaped for joy from the news he shared with me over the phone- he finally received his admission letter from UBC (University of British Columbia)! He was sharing with me the news in a very calm and quite voice as if it were not such a big deal for him. But I knew, as a person who had watched his struggles during the previous two years, that it *was* a big deal for him. Hyun confessed at our interview: "I think it (the day I got a UBC admission letter) was one of the most delightful days in my life." Notwithstanding (maybe because of) his failures in BCIT admission, he had worked harder than ever before, and his steadfast hard work eventually paid off. From the bottom of my heart, I

congratulated Hyun on his admission to UBC and leaped over the joy as if it could end his years of struggles.

However, another round of hardships and struggles arrived. Right after receiving the admission letter, he signed up for one summer course. Waiting till fall semester seemed a waste of time to him. Although he expected that his first coursework would not be easy, it was way harder than he expected. He reflected on the time:

> The beginning of university life... it was dreadful. I thought I would die soon. Even though the fact that there were more back hairs than blond hairs in the class comforted me, the fact that I was not comprehending the lecture at all except some technical terminologies made me so nervous. Every day, every hour, every minute came with an enormous sense of tension and insecurity. I was worried if I would be kicked out of the school, the school which I came after all those hardships. Throughout that summer, I felt like I was standing at the cliff-edge of doom. I thought that I should survive and I had to pass this course. Well, you know, before I started the course, I aimed an A. but soon my expectation dropped to "Pass"... Yet, the desire to "pass" overcame my doubt such as 'I can't make it'. I really worked hard. If I feel sleepy, I stood up or knelt down in order to keep studying.

Although he worked hard for more than two years preparing TOEFL score and improving his English, it seemed that "getting sufficient TOEFL was one thing and acquiring sufficient English proficiency to cope with academic performance was another", he said. Starting the summer course, for the first couple of years in university, English became a formidable challenge to him, naturally accompanying his identity struggle again. When asked of what was the difficult thing except language problem those days, Hyun told me:

> I think it was a kind of power relationship. Even though I wanted to ask a question, it was not easy for me to articulate it with appropriate sentences. However, when I tried it (the question), it sometimes came back with ignorance. It made me more intimidated and hurt my self- esteem. It made it more difficult to speak out. Then I would think, 'I will just do it all by

> myself'... I think I became very sensitive to how people respond to my English. Thus, I chose to work alone even when I should work with a group.

While Hyun seemed to consider "power relationship" as another problem besides his language problem, it is clear that they are inextricably intertwined. Norton and Toohey (2001) note:

> When a language leaner interacts with a member of the target language group, he is not only searching for words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions; he is asking to what extent he will be able to impose reception on his interlocutor. Thus, language learners are not only learning a linguistic system; they are learning a diverse set of sociocultural practice, often best understood in the context of relations of power (p.115).

To Hyun, this relation of power accompanied his English usage was more influential because of the vulnerable self-esteem affected by his upbringing:

> I think I was quite sensitive it (power relation) because of my low self-esteem and my desire to 'save face' in front of others. When I had to ask them again what I heard... it ruined my sense of self-esteem. If their response hurt my self-esteem or made me feel like losing my face, I would decide not to ask them again and to cope with things for myself.

Along with his vulnerable self-esteem, I noticed that his long-standing idea of "superiority of English native speaker" also played a role in his passive participation in English context. He confessed:

> Because Canadians were good at articulation and communication, I often unconsciously thought they were superior to me. Well, even though two people are on equal foot in terms of ability or subject knowledge, if one can articulate it in more perfect English, the person seemed to be superior to another person. That's why.. because I felt lack in my English, naturally and consciously or unconsciously, I thought them (Canadians) were much superior to me.
> His passive participation in class started to generate more work at home.

For the first two years, there was nothing but study in his life. Hardworking as he was, the average academic level of university seemed to be extremely high and competitive- At UBC, all computer science students are required to get average

7.0, otherwise they were not allowed to take courses in following years. Also UBC required all first year undergraduate students to take LPI (Language Proficiency Index) test, and the policy was that a strict limitation on course selection was given to those who could not pass the exam. Hyun started to take the LPI in his first semester and it took another year for him to finally pass the exam. According to my memory and his journal, he seemed to be restless with his hard work and accompanied identity struggle during the years. His journal notes:

> I am now 29, 30 years old. They are not small numbers. What can bring me some rest? Sometimes I need a rest, but for my present-self, can a rest be rest? ...I always ask myself for sober thinking and perfection. I think that, rather than true acceptance and humbleness, my pretension controls over me...The thoughts I had during the database lecture. .. LPI test.. the test I take for too long.. I started it in last June, but I haven't still passed it. What is wrong with me? My procrastination? Or too short -term planning? I think I should plan further. Also I should have passion and make efforts for that.

Understandable as his concern over academic performance was, I could not help thinking his concern went too far when I would hear him suffering from a bad headache, which was the result of serious stress from his school work in those days.[9]

Loneliness

Although Hyun invested a lot of time and efforts in school work, it did not mean that he deserted his social life completely. With his born nature of sincerity, he is the kind of person who keeps steadfast relationships with people with whom he once involved. For the years I have known him, he has continued

[9] Upon reading the above section, Hyun commented: "I think I was quite a sensitive person. Also, I was preoccupied with the thought that the level of my English would decide the level of my life at the time."

to participate in the Korean community at school and in the church. Though he was a quiet person, with his warm and open heart, Hyun had many Korean friends around him. Yet as a person who had a solid belief in the value of integrating into Canadian society and the English community, he also participated in English community events as often as he could: "Even though I put my one leg in a Korean community, unless I put another in English community, I did not feel comfortable," he said.

However, his pursuit of connection to the English community entailed some challenges. According to Hyun's reflection, the challenges derived not only from the language barrier but also from the ethnic chasm he found among students and racial prejudices he found in himself. Unlike his expectation before his entry into university, he realized that even in university classes there were not many opportunities to relate to people in English. Thus, out of his desire to seek more socialization with the English community outside the classrooms, he moved into campus residence building and joined the international Christian club at school. There he could find some socialization opportunities in English, yet mostly with other Asians. Although he thought that the Canadian students he met at school were usually nice, he felt an invisible boundary to develop a friendship with them. He said, "They were usually nice. Yet, if you take a closer look, white usually gather with white…When I met them personally, they are very friendly. But when they are in group, I felt differently."

According to Norton and Toohey (2001), there is a need for second educational research to focus on the social structures in particular communities and on the variety of positions available for learners to occupy in those

communities. In the social structure of school communities Hyun engaged in, it seemed that there were few positions available for him to be connected with Canadians. Naturally he built more connection with other ethnic friends. Yet, while experiencing deeper structure of multicultural university society, Hyun realized another side of multicultural society he had not been aware of in his early Vancouver life. Right there he was also able to see his own racial prejudice nurtured in his cultural tradition:

> When I first came here, I thought it (multi-cultural society) fair and equal. However, since I started my school life, as I come to live with diverse ethic people more closely, I found my own racial prejudices. For example, I found myself consider Whites more superior and some specific nationals inferior. Although I said I should respect all diversity, I already found myself discriminate people... Here as Whites are main-stream, and have the vested interests of the society, I believed that people in non main-stream should share equal opportunities and social life. Yet in another side of me, I was seeing non-mainstream people from prejudiced eyes.

Hyun thought his ironical attitude towards other ethnicities was due to his upbringing in a homogeneous culture. Thus, in order to be able to embrace all diversity genuinely, he thought he needed to become more involved with mainstream people and other ethnicities.

> I thought if I entered in to a Korean community only, I would go deeper in them... ghetto... Of course I should take a part in Korean community, but I also believed now that I was here in Canada, I should enter into mainstream community and different people. Otherwise, if I keep sticking to the people of same language and cultural background, I could be real conservative and might not know true diversity

While intercultural life could provide opportunities to experience divergent cultural worlds, it could also severe his deep sense of belonging to each or a certain community. Whereas Hyun tried to balance himself at the intersection of diverse communities, he also experienced cultural discontinuity between them,

which led him to a deep sense of loneliness. The most vivid place of loneliness was school, where he experienced Western individualized university culture along with the lonely task of studying. Lonely as the task of studying itself might be, the individualized life styles he experienced at school intensified the sense of loneliness to him. He shared:

> In Korea, loneliness and solitude was just the content of pop-songs. It was not a part of my life. However, here it came to me even though I don't want to take it. In Korea, people gather inside of one fence… here in dormitory life, staying alone… Do you know the moment I hated the most... When I come back to school alone after church and open the door of my dormitory room…and the situation that I have to sit in front of my desk and do my assignments… I hated it most…then I tried to avoid it… I would surf internet and avoid confronting my loneliness "

> Individualism…the thing that people keep some space among themselves. Before, I thought it positively, thinking people are taking good care of themselves. However, after going to university, I saw it differently. It makes life lonely… in contrast to Korean life where people blend themselves one another.

Such loneliness was often so unbearable that Hyun associated the sense of loneliness with the most negative experience in his *uhaksaeng* life. I could relate to Hyun's feelings when I recalled my own UBC dormitory life. The sense of loneliness Hyun and I felt at school life might have been stronger than other students, as we both enjoyed a kind of collective life style in the Korean church community outside of the school. I remembered myself noting in journal,

> It is like traveling between two different worlds. I am one time in the world of language and culture that give you a sense of belongings and security. Yet soon I find myself in the world of language and culture I should strive to get the sense of belonging and security. Switching from one to another, I feel lonelier.

Evidently, Hyun's university life was confrontation of such loneliness. "My university life... I think it could be summed up with one word... the word of "loneliness", he laughed.

From "*Munnani*" to "*Degimansung*" (a late bloomer) Identity

For the next couple of years, during his later years at UBC, I did not see Hyun so frequently because I moved to Alberta for my studies. Yet, whenever I visited Vancouver either en route to Korea or for a short vacation with my husband, Hyun was there to greet me, and we would catch up on life.

According to my memory and his reflection, there seemed to be no big outer change in his life during these years. However, as he moved onto his third year at university, he seemed to be free of the stress and tension of academic work. His friends and I noticed that he had recovered his witty remarks, which had disappeared during his first two years at UBC, and that his face looked lighter than before. The successful completion of his first two years of study seemed to give him a bit more confidence and made the rest of the years of studying look a little more manageable. Lighter hearted as he appeared to be, his journal at the time showed that his sense of loneliness and low self-esteem was constant:

> I spend time, being sympathetic with myself who is standing under the shadow of absolute loneliness. It's really horrible. It would be more horrible if a day to day become like that.... It is time now that I can go forward, but what kept me from it? Modesty? Pleasure from getting recognized indirectly? (Am I) seeing my self- worth by doing so? ... My strength is witty remarks. My weakness is underestimating myself with the doubts of 'can I do it?' I am already in thirties, 31years old, to be exact. Well, it is not a small age. Don't waste the potentials inside me any more.

Although he was not completely free from a low self-image, I noticed some signs of healthy change in him through his journal: He was acknowledging his strengths and potentials.

Then, four years after he studied university, when I had these conversational interviews with him, Hyun finally seemed to be free of his long-holding inferiority complex and to be content with himself. He said: "Even though I have been slow- in terms of age appropriate life achievement such as education degree, marriage and work, I started to consider myself as "*degimansung" (a late bloomer)." "Degimansung*" can be literally translated as "it takes long time to make a big vessel". It is an old Chinese proverb to describe the fact that great success (a big vessel) does not usually occur early or great talents are slow in maturing. He said, "Maybe my slowness is not something that is important. What's important is that, despite my slowness, I can go steadfast and make it." I have known many researchers had pointed out the possibility of personal growth and increased self-confidence as a result of cross-cultural experience. Yet, knowing his self-identity struggle over the years, hearing his confession that "the biggest gain I got from my cross-cultural experience is my self-esteem" was deeply touching. He said "although sometimes ...there is time that I don't trust myself completely, I think I came to love me more than I was in Korea, the trust in me... the trust in me has significantly recovered."

Several important events had taken place that contributed to the change in his perception of himself. One was that, despite his disadvantage in English, he successfully completed the school and landed a job at a computer company in BC. The four years of UBC and six months of job- hunting, in that light, had been a

relentless time of struggle with his sense of inferiority and insecurity. But through the years, Hyun continually realized something else: Despite the sense of falling behind and his limited abilities, he was able to continue to finish each semester successfully and finally find a permanent job. His goals and dreams had been worked out in confrontation with his deficiencies, but they worked out anyhow.

What is more importantly, through the years of cross- cultural experiences, he has learned that his "going slow" does not necessarily mean "falling behind" as he thought in Korea:

> When I first came here, I could not understand people's life style here. They were really slow. In Korea, I was really hard working. My life was a busy rotation of same routine... just to catch up with each goal of life race such as education- work- marriage – buying house. I really don't have time to reflect on myself and my life. As I led such busy life, when I first saw people's slowness and relatively relaxed life here, I could not really appreciate it. Yet, over the years I started to feel that, "Maybe this is how people should live- take care of family and look after their own health.'"

He further reflected:

> If I had lived in just one place, I would have thought that A should be A. Yet as I moved from one place to another place, I learned that A may not always be A, it can be B... I was able to open to different perspectives and thoughts… For instance, here I am going really slow. Not like me in Korea. However, although I am slow, ironically enough, I found myself content with it… I realized that going slowly helped me regain my composure.

For most of the time that I have known Hyun, he was a kind of person who measured his own self- worth by the criteria of the majority. When he cannot "keep up" the speed of majority, he understood it as evidence of his deficiencies. The shift of focus from "keep up" to "going slow with composure" thus marks a substantial change in his frame of thinking, an important step towards "self-affirmation". Indeed, he seemed very settled and confident by the time he had the last couple of interviews with me. He also said that people around him told him

that he looked very comfortable and relaxed. I celebrated his personal growth, his switching the clock to one of his own and his valuing his own pace.

Another important change was related to his spiritual growth and a gradual reconciliation of his relationships with "two fathers"- the spiritual father and the physical one. While struggling with what confronted him in the details of everyday *uhaksaeng* life, Hyun came to a spiritual discovery that his true identity must be worked out in relation to his two-fold needs- spiritual and social, which were embodied by his relationships to two fathers. Then, he came to realize how his two fathers were accepting him as the way he was: "From my spiritual father, I came to experience the acceptance and love that I had never known before. This realization became an immense source of my self-esteem.," he said. Following the restoration of his relationship to his spiritual father, the reconciliation of relationship to his physical father came along. According to Hyun, he came to see his father in a new way during the time of separation, which also led his father to see him in a new way as well:

> Before my Vancouver life, I thought my father was not trusting me. He might have...but not one hundred percent. Good and obedient as I was, I thought he was not putting his pure trust in me. However, after I came here, he began to say different thing to me. "I trust you" he talked over the phone several times. That means that he has changed and that I have changed, too. Listening to him saying such words, not just one time but several times repeatedly, I realized that he came to really approve me. It seemed that he found me in a new way during his several visits to Vancouver. It seemed that he began to be proud of his son who has lived earnestly and sincerely despite of all hard occasions of *uhaksaeng* life.... The words "I trust you" provoked tears in my eyes.

No wonder the fact that he was found to be accountable by his father provided him with enough sense of self-trust.

The other important event that contributed to his perspective change took place in his final year at UBC, when he was invited to the "Youth KOSTA" convention, which was held for teen-age Korean international students. There, Hyun was invited as a guest speaker, as one of the exemplary models of Korean international students and given an opportunity to share his *uhak* experiences in front of hundreds of teen international students. The event not only strengthened his self-esteem but also gave him important realization: "My dream of becoming and living as a raw model was *already being* fulfilled". Before he knew it, his dreamed future- to become like the speakers he met at KOSTA several years ago- has already being happened. When I listened to this, I was reminded of Smith's (2006) discussion of "frozen futurism":

> Teaching in Western tradition has always operated inordinately in the future tense, within a temporal frame that privileges the future over the present as well as the past. "When you complete this (course, grade, assignment, year, etc) then you can..." is a phrase that echoes throughout the discourse of all levels of education... To paraphrase Loy, the West lives in a kind of frozen futurism, in which what was expected to be revealed *has* been revealed, and that what the revelation discloses is that the future will always be more of this, a perpetual unfolding of more and more of this. In this context what education becomes is nothing but more and more of what it always was. The details may vary over time, but the essential grammar remains the same: Education seems like a preparation for something that never happens because in the deepest sense, it has *already happened*, over and over (p.25).[10]

As an international student who has dreamed of future success, Hyun might have been stuck in such "frozen futurism", thinking that he could make his dreams come true only when he completes this or that. Yet, through the experience of speaking at Youth KOSTA, he realized that his desired-self did not exist far away

[10] Hyun commented: "I think that, in Korean culture, we grew up with this kind of idea- when we achieve something, only then we can do something better later. From an elementary school to university... I think the idea was engraved in our educational system.

in the future, it was already there in his present time: "I realized that my dream of becoming of a raw-model was being already happened". If his dream gets already validated in the actual present and the future is a phantom of daily imagination or dream, he then has enough reason to be content with himself, who he is now.

Future Anticipation

Questioning "*Degimansung*" Identity: New Meaning Search

Hyun and my last conversation happened to take place when Hyun was preparing himself for a job he had been recently offered. By this time, as he had come to terms with himself, Hyun seemed to become more contemplative on his "*degimansung*" identity while anticipating a new future. In our last interview, Hyun shared a lot about his dubious mind towards his new job and the *degimansung* identity. In fact, the word "success" had always been a double-edged sword for him. On the one hand, because of the dream he had in mind, he was able to overcome many of disappointments and difficulties that he encounters in his cross-cultural life, which eventually led him to significant personal growth and self-contentment. On the other hand, the dream for success occasionally outlived his contentment and put him in daily trials of self-doubt and fearful loneliness. The more he tried to make something out of himself, which is to become "a bigger vessel", the more cost he would find he had to pay.

Hyun liked the job he was offered, but it required him to move to another city out of Vancouver, which meant leaving all the friends and things he had nurtured as home for the previous six years. He found himself struggling in the space between contentment and discontentment:

> Well... I was satisfied with the opportunity. In fact, I leaped over joy. Because I got a job that I wanted to do. The boss was kind and people seemed nice there... The conditions couldn't be better- good place to improve my English and a good pay. Before I got the job, I had thought I would take any opportunity whether it is part-time or contract- based work. However, I realized that it's really easy for my gratitude to turn into greed. Right after my commitment to the job, I found myself wanting more. I felt some emptiness in my heart, for some reason.

Yet the feelings of emptiness and the desire for "more" had its reasons. Hyun confessed them as follows:

> The loneliness... I was really afraid of loneliness. It was not a kind of simple fear that hit my head just once. But it came to me as a serious fear, making me feel so trapped, that I couldn't even sleep at night before I went to job interview.

Along with the fear of loneliness, Hyun's inner conflicts were exacerbated by people's different responses:

> When I shared people about the job, some people congratulated me heartily, but some questioned me why I was going to such countryside. They asked me how much money I would get, and told me why I was downgrading myself. When I heard such cold responses, I found myself defending myself. I found myself exaggerating the city and job as if I wanted to prove that I am by no means downgrading myself. That may mean that I am not still assured about myself.
>
> On the one hand, I am grateful for this opportunity, this job in Kamloops. On the other hand, I don't feel content... I become dissatisfied, wanting more. In fact, I know that I have a desire for a bigger company or bigger job for my future. I have a desire for such thing. I am not sure whether this is right or wrong ...yet.

What is this trick of a dreamed life? Up until this job opportunity, Hyun had gone out of his way to live up to his vision of success and achievement. But just when he thought that he had achieved something that could satisfy him, the sense of fulfillment suddenly began to slip away into some confusion and hunger, namely. The discrepancy between the story that was supposed to be and the story that was led him to reexamine the whole point of his seeking to "become a big

vessel". During the conversation, Hyun was seriously searching in himself for the meaning and purpose of his dream by pouring out all of his confusions and desires:

> I know because of my dream, my wanting more, I lose my contentment...only when I give up such greed, I may live with contentment. Yet, my struggle is...it is a little hard to explain it... Giving up my desire or dream, it seemed to me just my sticking to a comfort of present, rather than being content with my present.

When I asked him if there was a way to pursue one's dream while being content with one's present self, he seemed a little frustrated, which hinted at his inner confusions. Then he began to pour out many different thoughts that came to his mind, which eventually led him to clarify the meaning of his dream to him.

> I think I want go my way dreaming of something ...I don't mean that I want to achieve it later, but that I want to make it coming true day by day ... I think I need such dream that I should go after.

> I don't think I am pursuing success for the sake of money or power. First, I am not really greedy for money. I am telling it honestly... power... Well rather than power... I think it is like this... I want to learn something. I want to learn something in order to know something in deep. Although I am a university graduate, I have never gained deeper knowledge for various reasons. About the reason for the desire of knowledge, I want to say like this: I wanted to become an exemplar to those who will follow my path in the future. I still remember doctor Park who I met at KOSTA. I often think of him... I was really challenged by him. I want to live like him...he is a doctor, right? Successful in his profession. Well, but he did not become a doctor for his own wellbeing. Through the success, he was sharing his life with others while challenging the young so powerfully ... I think the influence is so powerful...I think I want to become like him...When I talked with Pastor Kim last time, one of my mentor, he told me that "you go there as one of pioneers. And later when you find people who follow your path, don't keep your experiences to yourself, but share it with them," he said... That really touched me. If I just stick to a comfort of what I have now, I may have nothing more to share with others. I wanted to learn more things, dreaming of such sharing.

It is known that honest and open conversations often lead people to a new horizon of self-understanding or self-discovery. Upon this point, Hyun seemed to experience that:

> Why am I get excited? (laugh) ... This is like, in the beginning of our conversation, I was suspicious if I am pursuing success from a secular point of view, or for the sake of reward for what I haven't yet achieved. But at some point of our conversation, in the mid of sharing, it becomes clear to me that I am pursuing this out of my desire to learn and to share more things... The thing is.. I had no vision or dream in my life before... but through the person like an American doctor, God restored me a new dream. I think there are many people who are out there living without dream or hope. I want to help them. In fact, I found myself already doing it. Now that I came to overcome my fear to a certain degree, I came to see some friends or juniors who were experiencing the similar fear that I had. Then I found myself encouraging them saying like this, "I was like you, but look at me. Take up your courage!" Before I knew it, I was telling them like that. That gave me a joy.

As he became clearer of the meaning of his dream on the one hand, Hyun grew more cautious in defining the word he was dreaming of on the other:

> What is "success"? I think I am in the process of figuring it out. I think I need to more years to understand what it is... I don't want to pretend as if I knew everything.. That is.. I think the way people understand one same issue could be all different. Maybe by sharing different ideas and thoughts with others, by experiencing more things, I may see better the things that were once vague to me.

Listening to him, I recalled Smith's (2006) expression of "recovery of personal truth", which is "who and what I am, arises out of the experience that I can never know it completely but only live within the thresholds of human possibility defined by the limit of what I know and what I have yet-to- know" (p. 30). Hyun's confession may be a sign of this personal truth emerging in him, one that is open to the tension of his knowing and unknowing. I appreciated his thought for having come to the point where he could say this, a new frame of thinking.

Wrapping up our last conversation, I was also reminded of what Dilthey (1985) says about the source of human understanding. He notes that human understanding is based on historical consciousness and that learning to share/comprehend our different histories is vital for the understanding. Indeed, I felt a sense of deeper understanding of him than ever before as Hyun openly shared his life history with me through the interviews. Further, I remember feeling greatly honored as he entrusted his struggles to me in our last conversation.[11]

Right after that interview, which lasted till midnight at my place, Hyun was supposed to leave for Kamloops. My husband and I walked him to his car to see him off. He smiled and moved forward to his new future, which seemed to be truly open to him. And there, I hope that he can find the figure in his old memory again, the *beautiful self* he once found on a trip to a Korean countryside a long time ago.

[11] Hyun commented: "The interviews gave me a space to express myself with freedom. Though sharing my experiences, I came to understand better the things that had not been clear to me. To you, the conversations would become data for your thesis, but to me, they were valuable opportunities to look back on my life. I thank you for that."

Chapter 5, Samgi

Introduction

The first time I met Samgi was in the summer of 2001. I still remember when one of my friends introduced Samgi to me, saying that he came to Vancouver just a few weeks ago and that they were on their way to my friends' place to cook some special food. "You know what he is? He is a cook! Today we are going to have some special dinner prepared by a professional cook!" Understanding my friend's excitement- taking care of three meals a day must be one of the biggest concerns in a male *uhaksaengs'* life- I exchanged greetings with him with a little curiosity. Although a male cook is not so uncommon in todays' Korea, meeting a male cook was kind of interesting to me, since I had been so accustomed to the Korean convention that considers cooking as one of a woman's responsibilities. His unique job and the somewhat unusual friendliness he showed to me, a total stranger to him at the time, left me with a strong impression of him. He endlessly questioned me about many things about Vancouver, Canadian people and my personal *uhaksaeng* life.

After the first meeting, whenever I met or heard about Samgi, he appeared to be adjusting to his new environment pretty well. He seemed very active and passionate in everything he did. Especially as far as English was concerned, his enthusiasm was remarkable. Whereas most Korean students tend to hesitate to speak English in front of same national students, he would practice his English loudly even when he was with a group of Korean friends only. No matter how scornful were the eyes he would get from other Korean students due to his broken

English, he boldly practiced English whenever opportunities were given to him, which made him stand out among Korean *uhaksaeng* friends. Besides his passion for English, his apparent ease with other Canadian parts of life- such as ESL school and homestay life- seemed to suggest that he was making an excellent adjustment to a new place.

Then five months passed by and I heard Samgi had returned to Korea to obtain his student authorization again. His plan was to come back in a few months and move onto a cooking school in Vancouver. Yet, a few months was extended to more than a year, and it was not until April of 2003 that I saw him again in my fiancé's place (he was temporarily sharing my fiancé's apartment at the time before finding his new apartment). Samgi greeted me with his usual smiling face and friendly gesture as if he had seen me yesterday. Being really happy with his return, Samgi seemed to be full of confidence and energy in settling into his new life in Vancouver. This time he was planning a long- term study and hoping to make a new home with his girlfriend who was supposed to marry him soon in Vancouver.

After their marriage, Samgi and his wife, Hongmi, moved into my neighborhood, so since then they have become what Koreans call "neighbor cousin" to my husband and me. As I have got to know Samgi better, I have come to see another side of his *uhaksaeng* life- the side behind his smiling look and apparent ease with his Canadian life. In fact, by the time I worked on this project, Samgi had moved from one stumbling block to another in his *uhaksaeng* life, and the relationship he kept with my husband and me seemed to be one of the few vital places of refuge he still had in a time of struggle and weariness. Thus, with

my desire to be there for him and with my wish to relate this project to our daily experiences, I invited Samgi to participate in this study. I also hoped that our sharing could provide him with a meaningful opportunity to reflect on his *uhak* experiences and gain a deeper understanding of them.

As I soon found out, the initial conversations with Samgi turned out to be a test of my capacity for listening and caring. To use Samgi's expression, having no gift of telling stories cohesively, he would jump from one story to another during our conversations. To be honest, I remember coming out feeling "what was this all about?" at the end of our first two conversations and wondering if our later conversations would just end up being his mumbled storytelling without getting him into any meaningful reflection on it. I tended to think that it was because Samgi did not really listen to my questions. He was simply following his stream of consciousness, letting one story trigger another. However, as I conversed with him more, I began to see it from another perspective. If this project was to offer any meaningful opportunity to him, it would be through my "listening" to him. As he was going through a kind of transitional time in his *uhaksaeng* life, I was able to understand better what he needed most was a person to share his concerns, joys, and fears as the words came in his way. Anyhow his stories got told, messages reflected.

In Korea, Before the Foreign Journey

Admiration of Foreign Life

Strong Individuality

Samgi came to Vancouver for the first time in May, 2001 as an international student. Prior to his trip to Vancouver, born in a low-middle class family, to hard working parents, he had led a very ordinary life in Korea, he said. Although he may have grown up in an ordinary life environment, there was something out of the ordinary in Samgi's childhood and adolescent story.

For instance, Samgi recalled himself having been somewhat different from other majority boys in his middle school days:

> I was a cheerful boy in elementary school days. It was when I transferred to boys' middle school that I changed a lot. Before boys' school, I had been to a coeducational school, which was very clean... Then when I transferred to boy's school, I was shocked to find it very dirty. I had hard time adjusting to the environment. In lunch time, they (other boys) would come and take some of my food with their spoons... I hated it so much that my stomach would get upset. Sometimes they would get hyper and do wresting in the back of classroom... I found it very violent.

To anyone who socialized in Korean classrooms, such things as taking friends' food with one's own spoon and wrestling with one another are typical behaviors of middle school boys. Yet, Samgi did not seem to be one of the typical boys in those days.

A tendency had emerged early on in his elementary school days. Unlike typical Korean boys, Samgi liked to cook and clean. "When my mom was out to work, I used to make some snacks for my brother and myself. My brother hated to do it, but I liked such things as cooking and cleaning." In his school, he was the kind of student who did things that most students avoided to do. His nicknames

were "a dung cart" or "cleaning captain". He recounted: " the reason they called me as " a dung cart" was because teachers always had me collect feces samples of students when it came to time for it. From grade one to six, I was given a duty to collect and keep them until I got everyone's. " When asked why the duty was given to him all those six years, he said, "as I did it in grade one, teachers thought I could do it in grade two. It went that way... as they (other students) hated to do it."

It is natural that such behaviors attracted much attention and compliments of teachers but they also made him the target of peer bullying and alienation. It seemed that teachers' recognition weighed more than peer's bullying and loneliness in the ego of young elementary school boy. Samgi recalled:

> I really liked cleaning. If I did it, teachers would complement it. When teachers and children all left school, I would stay alone and clean the school washrooms. One day, a teacher saw me and talked about it with my homeroom teacher. They complimented me that I was a good and hard-working boy. When you are young, if you earn some complements, you work harder in order to get more complements and recognition. Thus... since I was young, if I work on one thing, I would try to do it diligently and perfectly.

However, it seems that his tendency of "doing things diligently and perfectly" also brings out a rigid, self-righteous side of him. Since young, he said, "I had never done things that I did not like and once I wanted to do something, I did it no matter what others said." He was known "as a diligent but head-strong boy". It is not hard for me to trace such a boy in the Samgi I know. For instance, when he invited people to dinner, he would take so much time cooking in his way, that the dinner usually started three hours later than the arranged time. No matter what complaints or suggestions he received, he always stuck to his own way.

When invited to Samgi's place now, few people plan to arrive at the time invited and always know that they will eat much later than scheduled.

In a highly collective society like Korea which puts a strong emphasis on group cohesion, it is not difficult to imagine why Samgi was often blamed and bullied for his own individuality. Thus, since young, he said, "I have dreamed of going abroad". He thought (and still thinks) that foreign countries suit him better than his home country does. In his mind, "foreign countries are believed to be more liberal, self-assertive, and individualistic society where individual fulfillment could be more respected than group cohesion." Such an image of foreign countries was formed and concretized through his experiences of Western TV programs, movies, and the books, which eventually glamorized his dream of going abroad as worthy to desire. "In my childhood, when things were not going as I wanted, I used to tell my mom that I would go abroad and live there with a foreign woman", Samgi laughed. The dream and fantasy of the foreign country has continued to grow throughout his secondary and college years, as he found limited opportunities for his personality and career to evolve in the context of Korea's educational and social value system.

Career Choice and Inner Conflict

The desire of studying abroad became more solid as Samgi went on to high school. Unlike the majority of high school boys, by the time he was in the first grade of high school, he already knew what career he wanted to pursue for his lifetime: a cook. He was confident that cooking was what he really liked to do and what could make him happiest, but the decision came with much inner conflict:

> In the first year of high school, I told my parents that I would not go to a university. I told them I wanted to become a cook... However, at that time I had a deep conflict in myself whether I should choose what I like or something that I can boast about. First, I thought of some careers that would look good to others, the jobs that others would consider as something of high social standing, such as a diplomat and an English teacher. Then I thought of what I really wanted to do. I had to make decision whether I would pursue what I liked even though it was not something looks good to the eyes of others or I would go for other jobs just for the sake of others' recognition. Eventually I decided to do what I wanted to do.

Considering the cultural and social norms associated with the career of "a cook" in those days in Korea, - it was conventionally regarded as one of a woman's jobs and seen to have low social standing - it is not surprising that when he made such a career choice, he soon found that "there was no support from any educational and social system." Samgi recalled:

> My high school had little concern for students who wanted to pursue careers after graduation. Although they offered a few job preparation classes to some second year students who wanted to get a job right after graduation, the classes were usually limited to computers or mechanical skill trainings, which were typical jobs for male high school graduates.

Helpless, Samgi started to go to cooking classes outside of school in the evening to obtain a cooking certificate. Although what he really wanted was to get a job right after graduation, he also thought himself that "in our country, you have to get at least college diploma." Then, what he decided to do was to apply for a college through quota system with a cooking certificate instead of going through a regular exam war. Yet, taking a path different from that of a majority was not an easy task at all. For instance, cooking classes were available only when all students are required to do so called "self-control study" in school. Ironically, students' "self-control study" is not controlled by students themselves in Korean schools. It is a school policy that controls the study session. As the attendance to

self-control study was mandatory for all students by school policy, Samgi had to have his parents appeal to teachers to allow him to take cooking classes. However, what was tougher than the hectic process was a social norm that went against his career value. It was echoed in the peer's bullying as well as the teachers' indifference:

> When I came to school next morning after the absence of self-control study, they (classmates) used to make fun of me and throw sarcastic questions at me, "Hey! When are you going to cook *Zajangmyon* (Chinese noodles) for us?" Then, I would be very upset.[12] I think it still remains as the kind of bitterness in my heart.

Heart- breaking as the peer's bullying was, as a headstrong boy himself, there was no taking back his decision: he continued to join the cooking classes and obtained a cooking certificate. At the time, he had believed that the certificate would pave him the way for a college admission without his having to take a regular entrance exam. However, to his disappointment, just at the last minute of his application for college, he learned that he was not eligible for quota system- the quota system required applicant's working experience. There was no choice but him to take a regular university entrance exam then. Not having been prepared enough for a regular exam, his low score on the competitive exam eventually took him to a cooking department at a local college outside of Seoul. "I went there just to get a diploma." he laughed.

In a school which you went to just for the sake of obtainment of a diploma, it is understandable that Samgi could not find much satisfaction from his college life. The college he went to had few good experts in a newly established cooking

[12] Samgi's indignation was understandable when we consider that the image of "*zajangmyon*" cook was generally associated with the high-school dropouts or low- educated people those days in Korea.

department. He said, "I did not like school at all. The school could not provide me with what I wanted. There were just a few cooking classes. Most of classes were about boring lectures…I wanted to quit school." To be fair to his school, Samgi was by no means the most diligent student on campus. He skipped one too many classes if they did not interest him. If they were theory classes, he sneaked away. Only cooking-practice class he never skipped, he said.

However, the fact that he could not be satisfied with his school life does not mean that he was not satisfied with his career choice. In fact, his enthusiasm for cooking made him more critical about the school curriculum, which did not meet his high expectations at all. He told me that he was proud that he was majoring in cooking as a male student. He wore cooking uniform inside and outside of classes.[13] Although he skipped many theory classes, he never skipped cooking practice classes. When the school program required students to do a practicum at a local hotel for one summer, he did his practicum in every summer of college years. He said:

> I wanted to quit school and hoped to get into a hotel and gain more working experiences… because I felt like I was wasting my time in college. Thus, I did my practicum in every summer voluntarily. Because I wanted to learn more in a practical field…When I went to my practicum, I used to write down on my resume, "I feel happiest when I cook and I feel "be myself" the most in the mid of cooking.

However, his zeal for cooking and pride in his career identity was not always perceived positively, especially to other classmates in his department. He was often accused of "standing out and showing off too much" in classes: "I used

[13] According to Kanno (1996), our identities are expressed in our choice of clothes and in the general appearance we choose for ourselves. She notes that the choice of our clothes is one way of protecting ourselves in a new or hostile environment. It seems to me, then, Samgi's insistence on wearing a cooking uniform was his way of protecting himself in a new environment, which he wanted to run away from.

to sit front near my instructors and assisted them with whatever they needed. As I was too active and stood out..." "Many cultures are quite intolerant of those members who appear to deviate too far from the behavioral norms of majority," write Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, and Yong (1986, p.236). This is particularly so in a group oriented and highly homogeneous culture like Korea. His active engagement with instructors in typical teacher centered- classrooms, wearing uniforms all the time, and doing practicum every summer seemed intolerable behaviors to most class members. This, in turn, caused him a considerable internal conflict: "In Korea, you have to listen to others... You should not stand out in a crowd...Yet I still wanted to stand out."

As his inner conflict deepened, the dream of running away from the Korean educational/social system and traveling to "a new, better world" became more cultivated. For him, going abroad was to tryout an alternative new life, in which he believed his strong individuality could be more respected and his inferior social position as a cook could be refuted:

> It (going abroad) meant a new opportunity in my case. In a way, it also meant a kind of refuge to me because I could not get much recognition in Korea. How can I put this? There in Korea, I was a kind of person who does not belong to the leading group. From elementary school to college, I was expected to follow others... I thought that my style could fit better in a foreign country. There you can have your own opinions.

Studying Abroad: Dreaming of Success

Throughout my interviews with Samgi, just as in Hyun's case, I found that "success" was a recurring important theme in his perception of self-identity. When I asked him how he would describe himself in Korea, he replied:

> Diligent, hardworking, and self-assertive...And what was more important was… I had a definite goal in my life: I would achieve this at this age and do that at the next age, so that I would get to a certain high position by a certain age. Since young, I had really liked a TV program called "the world of success". I had never missed the program. There I watched the story of a successful cook. The cook named as Hu-duck Ju. He is a top chef in a Hilton hotel. A chef who got to the top position at the youngest age! I heard that he's annual income was about a million won. I wanted to become like him.

It is interesting to note how the media had shaped Samgi's perception of success and nurtured his ambition for it. Through the message delivered in the media, he developed the idea that the successful life was inseparable from high material gains and recognitions from others. Also, and again similar to Hyun, making accomplishments or getting ahead of others at a young age was an important aspect of a successful life. The message was clear: if you succeed, you lived a good life, which also proved your excellence and self-worth in a competitive society.

Nurtured with such a cultural/social value, it is not surprising that Samgi's desire for success pointed him out "studying abroad". As a matter of fact, his ambition and aspiration for success were imbued with his memories of suppressing cultural and social norms he experienced in terms of his career identity. As he said, he had received multiple messages of "a cook is a person who just cooks rice" in a Korean social hierarchy. The only way to be exempted from such an inferior position was to become a chef at a major hotel in Korea, which seemed to require him to have a good ability in English. Samgi explained:

> I needed English…In Korea, generally the top chefs of major hotels are foreigners. Except Hotel Silla, every major hotel is the franchise of foreign hotels. So it is essential to have English ability to get a promotion or to become a chef in Hotels. Also, I had a big admiration of foreign country. So English was always in my mind.

Samgi's explanation reveals what Pennycook (1994) describes as "politics of English" that is playing a role in current Korean society: English as the language of power and prestige, which implies that English has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion or exclusion from further education, employment, or social position. Pennycook also notes how this perception of English- as a tool to access social and economic power- tends to develop a cultural/linguistic hegemony between English speaking countries and non-English speaking countries. Samgi's statements witness how his views of English in relation to economic and social success have developed his strong "emotional attachment to English and its culture" (Kachru, 1986). The big admiration of foreign country and English knowledge, imbued with the desire for success, was often mentioned as an important reason for his coming to Canada.

Thus, right after graduation, he decided to study abroad. Fortunately, by this time, the financial conditions of his family were able to support his studying abroad. When he decided to go abroad, Vancouver seemed to be an optimum place. From one of his acquaintances, he heard that Vancouver had advanced international cooking school as one of the best resort cities in the world. More than that, the information that "A cook gets a good pay, and cooking is respected" attracted his attention. He soon looked for school information and set out to Vancouver in April of 2001. When he left Korea, he had a firm belief that a foreign country would give him better opportunities with no or at least, fewer systemic and unfair barriers to success. He was assured of himself that he would make a successful life there and become more than what he would find himself to be in Korea.

In Canada, During Cross-Cultural Experience

First Sojourn: Increased Admiration of Foreign Life

When Samgi first came to Vancouver, he was full of enthusiasm for learning English. He planned to finish an ESL program as quickly as he could and move on to a cooking program at college. Before his departure, he even thought, "I will not meet any Koreans and just study hard". However, things did not turn out as he planned. It was not long before he found that he could not avoid Korean students whose population is generally high in Canadian ESL classes. Then there came a change in his perspective:

> I came to think that I should try not to speak Korean rather than not to meet Koreans. Thus, in school, I tried not to speak Korean at all, but I did not avoid meeting Koreans outside of school. Because avoiding them seemed like denying myself. Also although I needed English, English was just English…I needed Korean as well...Because I felt much more comfortable in Korean.

Then one month after his arrival, by the time I first met Samgi, he was meeting a bunch of Korean *uhaksaeng* friends at church and indulging in his happy social life. He had a fortunate start in that he met a nice community who recognized his career identity and valued it:

> I was happy with people. I really liked meeting them. We used to go grocery shopping and cook together. I was happy that my cooking was able to please them. When they asked me to eat together, I often said that I felt full enough just by watching them enjoy my food. Even though I didn't eat food, I was happy.

By the end of the summer, his Vancouver life was in bloom. Being active and hard working, he cooked wherever he was invited to and got much recognition from his cooking.

Also, in terms of English learning, he felt less restriction in Canada. A couple of times in our interviews, Samgi used to complain that "In Korea, if you use some English words, people blame you for being a "show-off"." However, being in Canada and especially hanging out with *uhaksaeng* group earned him different feedback. He was seen as hard-working and even as a kind of raw model of a good English learner. I remember myself having once told him, "you surely will master English soon" when I saw him approach Canadians with no hesitation or when he would pour out endless English questions to me.

There is no question that such a happy start in Vancouver life increased his admiration for foreign life: "It was the happiest days in my life. When I went back to Korea, I wanted to return as soon as possible," he said. It seemed to me that Samgi's admiration for foreign life had increased because his first sojourn days provided him with a high sense of self-worth that he had never experienced in Korea: As a cook, he was no longer seen as an inferior social-positioned person. Rather, he was treated as an expert and welcomed by most Korean *uhaksaengs* whose main concern never miss out cooking. Also, his strong individuality expressed in his English learning process was no longer blamed as "show off" but seen as a sign of positive zeal and enthusiasm for learning. After five months in Vancouver, when he had to go back to Korea in order to attain student authorization for longer study, he was confident enough, "I am perfect here and I could make a good life here".

Considering the positive experience and memory in Vancouver, it is understandable that Samgi became quite impatient when his plan of returning to Vancouver was put off for a long time due to many unexpected circumstances: his

parents' financial situation became more restricted, the parents of his girl-friend objected to their daughter's going to Vancouver, and the process of visa application was prolonged. He recalled the time:

> I wanted to come back as soon as possible. I kept saying to myself and people that I should go back to Vancouver quickly. Yet the circumstance did not allow it. It was difficult time. At the time, I was obsessed with the ideas of "quickly" such as- I should go back quickly, settle my life there quickly, make money quickly and buy home quickly. At the time, just a few months seemed to be too long time. I wished Hongmi (his girlfriend) could accompany me to Vancouver and began her study quickly.

It is interesting to note that Samgi survived his difficult times in Korea before and after his first sojourn by cultivating the dream of traveling to his perceived "better foreign world". This dream of traveling had already taken a great hold of his localized experiences in Korea. In other words, his imagination of going to foreign country and identifying himself with its culture delocalized his local experiences and identity construction even before his actual long term stay in Canada. After more than a year's delay, in December of 2002, Samgi finally returned to Vancouver.

Second Sojourn: Ideals and Realities- a Framework for Change

Learning English and Academic Life

When Samgi came back to Vancouver again, he became more serious about his English. In order to make a better and more successful life in Canada, he believed that he needed to get a formal training in the cooking field. After a few months study in ESL, by the time he regained the knack of speaking English, Samgi applied for a cooking institution at a college level. The response from the school was quite disappointing. The authority in school advised him, "Your

English is not ready. Please come back when your English gets more improved. Otherwise you would waste time and money here".

Disappointed, Samgi seemed to take the advice of school with no resentment at the time. Admitting that he hadn't made enough effort to improve his English, he decided to wait for another year. Yet, considering his obsession with the idea of "quickly" those days, the waiting must have been another test of his patience.

After a year's waiting, Samgi was finally accepted by the cooking school. Upon his admission to the school, Samgi felt compelled to work as hard as possible for his future job. At this time, he had a strong wish to apply for Canada immigration. He was well aware that his immigration might not be possible unless he had working experience in Canada and that jobs were hard to come by without good English and good evaluations from the school.

However, just a few days in school was challenging enough to make him doubtful about all imagined plans:

> It was so tough. I found that I am the only Korean in the middle of Canadians. I could not comprehend English lecture well. I have never experienced such classes before. I thought of quitting. I regretted my self, 'I should have gotten a job in Korea. What am I doing here?' I was seriously thinking of quitting the school. I felt like I became a child, just like a dumb. A child who has to ask for guidance all the time even for just small things.

I still remember my surprise when I heard from Hongmi that Samgi in those days often seriously thought of going back to Korea. Being well aware of his attachment towards Vancouver life, I could imagine how difficult time Samgi was going through due to the challenges of his English ability.

His difficulty in English comprehension and speaking was so great that, during our interviews, Samgi repeatedly told me about what he called "a language shock":

> I think nowadays as the world is well globalized and well connected through internet or media, there is less so called "a culture shock". I think the biggest shock for me was a "language shock". It is the most difficult thing in foreign life... Compared to Korea, here nobody teaches you what to do. You have to look for help for yourself if necessary. While others seemed to get such help by conversing details in their language, I could not get much help because of my short English. Even now (after a year's training in school) I feel same way.

Curriculum guidelines and technical reports like to discuss the needs of ESL programs and international students such as "meeting the needs of ESL". However, a close look at Hyun and Samgi's experience during their first academic years reveals that there is a significant gap between ESL program and regular academic programs. That is, many ESL programs fail to get international students ready enough, to pursue further academic study. It seems hardly fair to me that many ESL programs and academic institutions take all the benefits of having international students in their program while letting them do all the adjusting by themselves and failing to meet their English needs.

Naturally, Samgi's learning experience in English and school adaptation seemed to be a complex psychological process, which entailed challenges to his self-identity and self-esteem. According to him, the biggest challenge was derived from his marginalized place in school as a consequence of his English ability: "As Canadians were good at English, I felt like I was always in the position to be directed by them. Because of my short English, I could not get into a mainstream. I could not join them". From his point of view, whether or not one arrived in a

new school already equipped with full English proficiency determined one's place in the school: If you did, you had a ticket for entry into the center; if you did not, you were outside of the fence. Clearly language was the key: "I really wanted to go into the center…but it all depends on English," Samgi said. Naturally, as a person who wanted but could not cross the fence over to the center, Samgi suffered a sense of inferiority and insecurity. Lave and Wenger (1991) defines learning as a certain forms of social co-participation rather than seeing it as the acquisition of prepositional knowledge. Indeed, Samgi's learning process in the cooking school was a constant struggle to participate in his English community without losing self- worth.

While it was clear that his Canadian school life and English learning were less than ideal, he tried to overcome this challenge with his very Korean character: his diligence and politeness. In classes, especially in practicum classes, he never took breaks and kept working. Sometimes his classmates would laugh at his overwork, but "I would respond them just with smile and kept working to the stage of my satisfaction," he said. Eventually his hardworking and politeness paid off, so that in one semester when he was at a risk of failing one course, his supervising chef helped him pass the course with encouraging words, " Don't be down. It is just because of English. But you are really good at practicum classes and polite". After that he thrived in his "hardworking spirit" more than before. When he started a practicum at a local hotel, he never came home before midnight. Even though he finished his work around eight o clock, he volunteered to work there for three or four more hours. He was called a "rock star" in the hotel. The

coworkers even used to plead him to "go home, go home" when Samgi stayed at work too late. Samgi reflected,

> Because I wanted to get a job at the Hotel... As I was international student, as I had no work permit, and as my English was limited, I thought I should make up such disadvantages by working hard, showing them my diligence.

Although his hard work may have helped him pave the way for a job opportunity, as a person who watched the other side of his life, I must confess that I did not always feel positive about his workaholic life. It cost him many aspects of his social and family life.

Family and Social Life

After ten months of his second arrival in Vancouver, Samgi got married to Hongmi, who finally decided to follow her boyfriend to Canada, even after much reluctance. Before in Korea, working as a professional nurse, satisfied with her job and life there, Hongmi had no intention of coming to Canada. Also, not being able to speak much English, Hongmi had a kind of fear of foreign environments. Yet, her long-term boyfriend wanted Vancouver life so much that she could not help following his decision. In addition, Samgi kept convincing Hongmi that she could make a good career life in Vancouver, saying that "nurses have better social position in Canada and they can make good money". He even promised her that he would support all her education trainings and pay all the tuition fees for her. After long waiting and passionate persuasions, Samgi finally got married to Hongmi shortly after her arrival in Vancouver.

However, it was not long before the different goals of foreign life started to clash and brought about endless conflicts of their married life. As for Samgi, he dreamed of his wife becoming a successful nurse in Vancouver. He wished that

his wife would pursue a professional career path with as much zeal and efforts as he had for Hongmi. Yet, Hongmi did not share Samgi's career dream and skipped too many ESL classes in favor of doing house chores or shopping. Hongmi had her own good reasons for that: First of all, she did not come to Vancouver of her own volition. She felt she was taken out of the country because of Samgi's persistent persuasion. Thus, Hongmi did not feel much responsible for the opportunity of studying abroad given to her over many others. Secondly, after a few months study in ESL, Hong felt that her becoming a professional nurse would end up just as a dream: "With my English, it (becoming a nurse) seemed too long way to go", she used to say. It seemed to her that passing English proficiency exam and finishing nurse training programs were impossible goals. It is understandable when the goals seem to be far beyond one's reach, it is easy to back down and just give up.

Understandable as Hongmi's feeling was, it was clear to me (and Hongmi) that Samgi had no easy time accepting his wife, as the way she was. From his very rigid side of being a Korean man, which might be an influence of his upbringings in the Korean patriarchy, by virtue of his provision for his wife's education, Samgi felt that Hongmi should feel indebted to him, and had the obligation to pay him back in the form of fulfillment of his dream. Although he never clearly admitted this, Hongmi's and my suspicion were that his desire of her becoming a nurse in Canada was partly for the fulfillment of his own dream: a

dream to immigrate into Canada through his wife's skills in case his career experience would not allow him such an opportunity[14].

At the same time, yearning for autonomy is part of a young wife's life in today's Korea. With little aspiration for her own career in Vancouver life, Hongmi questioned blind submission to her husband's authority which yielded much rebellion against Samgi. The number of school skipping days increased. Consequently the number and the degree of conflicts and quarrel became so serious that people around them wondered if their marriage would even last for one year.

Along with rocky marriage life, other areas of social life led Samgi to face his undesired self and the tough reality of foreign life. He had an extreme difficulty having close and long- term social relationships with either Koreans or Canadians. With Canadians or English speaking people, as he mentioned before, there was a high language barrier. Besides, as he got more involved with Canadian culture, he realized his inner resistance towards Western individual lifestyle:

> Here people always keep some space in their relationships. Some space you cannot step in...like a privacy...I think it's very individualistic. In our country, if we get close, we are accessible to each other. Yet, here people keep their 'privacy' behind door and let nobody touch it. It's easy to become friends, but never deeply. When they meet, they are friends. When they depart, they are strangers. Maybe I feel this way just because I am not a Canadian. Having experienced this, I realized that I am a real Korean.

Claiming himself as a real Korean, he had by no means a happy relationship with many Koreans, especially with a number of his Korean roommates. Because of their financial difficulties, Samgi and Hongmi shared their

[14] After reading this passage, Samgi commented, "Yes, I admit that it was for the sake of immigration. Also for the sake of financial success..."

apartment with at least two roommates. As far as I remember, more than ten people left their house within a period of six months. Part of the reason was the couple's frequent arguments and disputes. When unharmonious sounds keep coming out, it is not surprising that no one wants to listen to them. Another reason involved Samgi's rigid and self-assertive character, which was exposed in his strong control over the household: The cleaning must be done in his way. The house facilities must be used according to his instruction. Especially when it came to a financial matter, he dealt with it in a very practical way, which may be considered as too "Canadian" to some of their Korean roommates: some people who left Samgi's place once told me. They also told me that it seemed like Samgi wanted to display his authority over others as an owner of the place. However, most of his young college aged-roommates could not bear the control Samgi exercised over them and left, expressing deep disrespect for such a rigid character and conservative authority that was still practiced in a cultural context where they expected their individual autonomy to be more valued.

Samgi's trouble in social relationships reminded me of what Sarup (1996) says about people who leave their homeland. He notes:

> On the one hand, it is interesting to leave one's homeland in order to enter the culture of others; but, on the other hand, this move is undertaken only return to oneself and one's home, to judge or laugh at one's peculiarities and limitations. In other words, the foreigner becomes the figure on to which the penetrating, ironical mind of the philosopher is delegated-his double, his mask (p.9).

Samgi left his country as he believed that a foreign country would suit his individualistic and self- assertive character better than his home country. Yet, in the far foreign land, what he found was his ironical mind towards the

individualized culture. Also, he still found himself suffering the same old problem- a sense of alienation and criticism from others for having such a character in him. This time it was much more painful to him than before in Korea as it happened where he expected to see some difference. After all, Samgi's conflicts with his wife and roommates, along with his spiritual part of life, seemed to lead him on a reflective journey of self-awareness. As will be explained shortly, by the time we had these interviews, he was re-examining and questioning many things and values he had said before.

Spiritual Life: Source of New Meaning Negotiation

Through the time of difficulty in his second sojourn life, one solace Samgi had was church. As I mentioned in his first sojourn life, in the earlier Vancouver life he was initially attracted to the church for a reason other than religion. That is, it was a place where he could meet a people who recognized and valued his career identity. He felt more of a sense of self-worth by being recognized from people there. However, what with home returning, church slipped out of his mind for a while. He said, "when I returned home, I became distant from church. Because my life was busy, and because of the circumstances…" But when he came back to Vancouver, as his disillusionment with foreign life increased, Samgi started to attend the church on a regular basis. Later Hongmi accompanied him every Sundays.

As his church-going became stable, by the time we started these interviews, church life seemed to take on another meaning for him, more than just an opportunity to socialize with people. That is, he became more serious about the

Christian faith itself, which he now considers as an indispensable part of his self-identity:

> Looking at myself, I confess that my life of faith has become one of the most important things to me. Maybe I was just a "churchgoer" for a long time. Yet, without the life of faith, I would not know who I am now.

As his spiritual life deepened, it became a source of security during his stumbling time. He said, "It (Canada) was nice place to meet God. I was lonely and my life was hard. Also there were not so many people I could share my problems with. I could fill the empty space in my heart by knowing God, the place nobody can fulfill". Whether cause or consequences, the Christian faith offered him a sanctuary at the time when his *uhaksaeng* life was most tired. In contrast to the conflicts and alienation he felt at home or school, Sundays at church were filled with a sense of security and acceptance.

More importantly, his deepened spiritual life began to invite him to re-think the purpose of his studying abroad. That is, he came to question the meaning of success he had kept in him for a long time. Over the years, at church, he had met some people who lived with full contentment, always stable, even though they had not made what he so considered as a successful life. "Although they are the people who had little social recognition and material possession, they seem very "peaceful and happy"", said Samgi. He admired the peace and happiness their Christian faith gave them. When Samgi was sharing this with me, he was kind of taking big steps in terms of what he had been dreaming of. Despite his English problem, he successfully finished his coursework at college, and there was a good prospect of getting a job at the hotel where he took an internship. However, these accomplishments did not seem to bring him what he had expected.

Walking up the dream of success ladder did not seem to provide the peace and contentment he found in some church people. Through the influence of some church people and the disillusionment with his own dream, Sam started to examine and question the whole point of success he had defined before:

> I realized that I have not really thought of what success is… people say that success is to have a position of high recognition and to be rich… Yet, now I think it can mean different things to different people. It is something hard to explain…people say that when they get to higher position, they became successful, but I have a doubt if it is a real success… you know people who become very successful in public such as famous movie stars… Anybody would consider them successful, but if we open the lid of their lives, we would find they have their own conflicts and problems inside of their lives… For instance, Bill Gates, even though he is successful, he must have his own problem, conflicts and troubles… So I don't think there exists what we can call "success".

When he was talking about this, he was deep in thoughts. It seemed clear to me that this question of success has been on his mind with no light struggle. He seemed to be trying to organize his thoughts and confusions in the mid of our conversations. He continued:

> Many people want to be successful in their lives… An idea hits me now. Success… it is not something you can achieve with your own efforts only… when I think of the TV program "The world of success"… I think there must have been many things TV could not show… The successful shown by TV… They are the tops in their profession, but their lives must have had their own time of pain and hardships...They might not have thought "I have to become successful" Rather, they might have been just loyal to their own work, and the opportunities came with their hard working… so they seemed to make a successful life in the eyes of others. Then their stories came out on the air… Maybe others can say "someone is successful", but he or she may not claim that his/her own life is successful... A person who claims his/her own success, he/she must be stuck in his/her own imagination.
>
> As the messages I heard from the church…As for my wish for success…in the beginning, I did cooking because I really liked it… But when I had thought of what success would bring to me… I realized that "people" were in my mind… I wanted their recognition… I think I pursued success for that… people's recognition… In the beginning I wasn't cooking for the

> sake of success... Yet, gradually I became ambitious and dreamed of success... I thought over this quite a few times...I can't deny that I want some high position, be famous, and get recognition from people...Now I think that, wherever I am, what really matters should be the fact that I really like the job, but not the recognition of others. Yet still I cannot lay these down...my greed (laugh).
>
> Here in Canada I think I became low. That is, if I wanted to pursue the success as I had defined it before, there was a language barrier, I did not know many people, and I was an Asian...such things... Earlier when I dreamed of being successful, there were such obstacles... But now I think I would do my work just because I like it, rather than because I want to become successful. To become, what is called, successful, is one thing and to feel my happiness and peace is another... they are different things.

If, as Taylor (1989) argues, our identity is inseparable from " questions about what makes our lives meaningful and fulfilling" (p.4), Samgi's questions and struggles over the meaning of success may be a sign of a new identity emerging, one that is his own, one that transcends the values of the public. True, he was still negotiating the meanings of success with ambivalent words and feelings. Still compared with the last couple of years, the change was apparent. Samgi used to have a very definitive way of saying things such as, "I should get immigrated to Canada. I should get a job and be successful as soon as possible"; "Hongmi should go to a nursing school soon and become a nurse" in his conversations with me or his wife. He seemed to believe as if he could drive his or his wife's futures in his desired direction at his own speed. But now he grew more reflective and became more attuned to the things behind such clear-cut terms. If nothing else, he seemed to have taken a humble journey to better self understanding:

> I think I came to find myself that I had not known before. That is, I had thought that I was perfect and I could make good living if I work hard. Yet, I came to realize the things I had not been aware of... my character, my weaknesses, my greed.

As a sign of this new outlook on himself, Samgi became more attuned to his relational life than ever before. And his focus shifted from his future success to his present relational life:

> Now I come to think over how I should live with other people...How I should use my talents to serve others... such thoughts… That is key point. How I should live today rather than worrying about tomorrow. I think I am in kind of some transition… thinking of others more than before…thinking of how I should live today rather than tomorrow.

Whether he will continue to develop around this new premise or he will revert back to his old one, I still do not know. I believe I need a few more years to see.

Future Anticipation

The Meaning of Place: Foreign Country Dream

As Samgi began to see the meaning of success from a new perspective, he seemed to have a certain change in his thoughts about where he would make his home place for the future. As I mentioned above, his purpose of studying/living abroad was strongly related to his desire for success. However, as his desire has gone through some modification, he often mentioned in our conversations, "where to live doesn't much matter to me." He said:

> Somebody asked me if I could get a job at a hotel by the time I finish my internship there. I responded that I was not quite sure about that. Before, I really wanted to immigrate here… But now if that would be this country, France, or America, I am not restricted by the place. I don't want to be restricted.

He repeatedly said in other conversations, "before, somebody told me that it would be better to have and raise children here. But now I am not restricted by the place."

When I first heard this, I almost believed that he finally got out of his foreign country dream. Yet when these kinds of lines were repeated in his story so often and when I looked at his transcripts over and over, I realized that he might have let go of his "Canadian dream" but not his "foreign country dream". Interestingly, I noticed that the list of places he wanted to make his home was always limited to the foreign countries such as France, America, and Canada despite his own claim that he would not limit his scope or future plans to some particular places. When I asked him if he was aware of the limit of his lists, he mumbled. "Well, America, France, Canada, Africa... Korea, Wherever I would be...," he could not finish his response. In fact, it was the silence that admits his constant desire to make his home place in a foreign country.

It might be true that, with his disillusionment with Vancouver life and with his changing perception about success, he became less concerned about immigration into Canada. Still the foreign country dream goes on in his mind. At the end of his silence in the above conversation, Samgi confessed, "Comparing them (home country and foreign lands), I think I have a constant wish that I want to live in foreign countries." Now, the reasons of his preference foreign countries over home country have more to do with what he dislikes about his home country than what he dreams to accomplish in foreign lands or his admiration of foreign life. He explained:

> The society (Korean) is too competitive and people have become more selfish. Of course people here are individualistic... of course each country has its own merits and demerits. In case of our country, they criticize people here as individualistic...Yet, I consider these people are honest in a sense. I don't think our country are not qualified to criticize people here as individualistic. People's lifestyles in country became very selfish and self-centered.

> When we go to government offices, if a person knows somebody there, he/she may get a special favor. But here everyone is more equal. No matter who it is… Of course there must be unfairness in this country too. But relatively, I think our country is worse… You cannot live according to the original rule. Otherwise, you will be treated as a fool, have a certain loss, or get behind of others.[15]

According to Carter, Donald, & Squies (2003), human beings have a sense of self that situate them in ethical space and how that space is constituted varies through history. In fact, Sam's personal experience and history with Korean and Canadian culture have constituted the ethical space Samgi was defining above, and from which he was making a choice of where to make home. At one level, his preference for living in a foreign country was his resentment towards Korean culture, a highly competitive/hierarchal lifestyle. But I can see another level of self- protection based on his cautious and self- realizing thinking. That is, he was protecting himself from his inner world, his very self-centered and competitive self, not just from the outer world of competitive Korean culture. If he goes back to Korea, he fears that he may go back to his past self. "Now is kind of turning point time for me," he often mentioned in the last couple of interviews. Over the years away from his home country, he was able to find, as he said, "the self I had not known", which was nurtured in Korean culture. He wanted to change it, yet the change was easier said than done. He knew his vulnerable self and needed to guard it in a foreign place:

> The most difficult thing to me now is that even though I want to do well to others, I become stingy and selfish. I think the real problem is me. Because I don't change myself, I have trouble with myself…If I had not come here, I would not have known myself…It may all depends on how we live wherever we are… but in my case, I feel more comfortable at foreign country.

[15] Samgi commented, "I would prefer "racial discrimination" in foreign country to "*hakbol* (educational credentials) discrimination" in my home-country."

Samgi's comments reminded me of what Taylor (1989) explains about the link between our senses of the "good" to our senses of place. To paraphrase him, he notes that at the core of our identities are our ideas of "good"- what is important and what kind of life is fulfilling- and that we feel at home when our lives are heading in the direction of the "good". Through the years of *uhaksaeng* life, it is evident that Samgi has redefined his own ideas of "good", which includes changing his competitive and rigid self. He may feel more at home in a foreign place as the place seems to assist him better in moving to the direction of his redefined "good" now, giving him a more a solid anchoring[16]. It may reveals certain personal weakness, his need for something to ground himself- that's why he hesitated to acknowledge his preference for a foreign land in the first place. Yet I do not at all think it is a weakness that one ought to be ashamed of. I just hope he can keep moving and embody his "good" someday.

[16] Samgi commented, "Yes, here in foreign country, I don't have to compare myself constantly to others through Korean standards of success and worry about how others would evaluate me. That helps me live with more human dignity."

Chapter 6, Heejin

Introduction

The first time I met Heejin was when she had just arrived in Canada in 1999. I remember her introducing herself to me, saying that she came to Canada to pursue university education after finishing high school a year earlier in Korea. Maybe because she was new to Vancouver at the time, and probably under a lot of pressure that she should get into university as soon as possible, she looked very nervous and tied. That was my first impression of her.

The following year, I heard that she had been admitted to UBC after one and half years of hard work. Although she continued to go to the same campus and church as I, we had not been able to get to know each other well. For each of us school life kept us busy and we had each developed a different circle of fellowship. Then one cold rainy evening, I had an opportunity to visit Heejin's place. At the time, as a first year student in UBC, she was struggling with her essay assignment and desperately looking for someone who could proofread her paper. I still remember the sympathy I felt for her while reading the two page-essay paper. It was not because the essay showed her unfamiliarity with North American academic writing, but rather because of the sense of insecurity and frustration covering all over her at the time. Remembering my own struggle with my first assignment at a graduate school- I remember crying over the paper out of my frustration of not knowing how to write- I could relate to her sense of stress and insecurity.

Another year went by and I heard that she had transferred from UBC to a college in a different area. It seemed that she could not make herself adjust well to UBC life, and had had some difficulty meeting its academic standards. She looked more intimidated and insecure at that time, and I again felt sorry and sympathetic for her seemingly unstable road of *uhak* life.

Then upon my return to Vancouver to do this research after two years in Alberta, I learned that she had just transferred from a college to another university that happens to be near my place. She was expecting to finish her undergraduate program within two years. When I saw her again, although she was lamenting her prolonged *uhak* life, saying that "I go to school too long time" with a shy smile, she seemed much more secure and stable than before.

As my plans for this project matured and participant selection was very much on my mind, it occurred to me to contact her and invite her to participate in this study. The fact that Heejin, whom I have always liked but have never had enough time to get to know properly, appeared within my reach again made me feel like I had found someone I could work with. I also wondered what went with, to use her expression, her "stormy *uhak* life" and how her personal experiences could inform this research inquiry.

In Korea, Before Foreign Journey

A *Mobumsaeng* (exemplary student) Identity

Heejin left Korea when she was twenty-one. She said there was nothing special in her childhood and teen-age years story prior to her trip to Vancouver. Heejin was born in Seoul and grew up in *Jamsil,* one of the *palhakgun* (eight best

school districts) in Seoul until she went abroad. Similar to Hyun's experience, Heejin's parents, who were very enthusiastic about their children's education, moved to *Jamsil* from her grandparents place when she started to go to elementary school.

Heejin describes her child and adolescent self as "*a mobumsaeng* (exemplary student) like a fool": "I was a typical *mobumsaeng*. An exemplary student like a fool. I did only what my parents wanted me to do, and never did what they told me not to do. I couldn't think of anything else." As she was the first child in the family, her parents had a lot of expectations for her and she never failed meeting their expectations. By "expectations", Heejin meant good academic achievement and performance at school. Indeed, she was academically bright, never failing to be in the top group of the class throughout high school days. "I thought I was going fast in the right track and I had a great pride in it. Thinking of it now, I feel like I was so locked within my wall," she laughs now.

She attributes her "*mobumsaeng* like a fool" tendency to the family and school atmosphere she grew up in. Her grandparents, whom she had spent early childhood with, were both school teachers and had a great interest in their first granddaughter's education:

> He (my grandfather) used to tell me, 'you have to study a lot'. In their generation, the people who had high education were respected. Maybe because of the poverty those days, the highly educated people have been considered successful. He was very proud of his two sons, that is, my two uncles, who became doctors and led successful lives. He used to emphasize 'success', saying that 'A person should live a successful life, if not, it is better not to live.' He used to speak in this way.[17]

[17] Hoshin commented: "My grandfather had so much love for me and I grew up with his abundant love and care. He was very proud of my excellent academic achievement, and had a great expectation about me."

Heejin's grandparents' enthusiasm for education naturally handed down to her parents and eventually to herself. Always having been able to catch up her parents' high expectations since childhood, Heejin learned early what a *mobumsaeng* like her need to do and expect from life:

> Before I knew it, the values my grandparents and parents had handed down on me. Regarding the study, although I doubt if I liked it genuinely, but I was very competitive... The thought that I should do better than others was much on my mind. Maybe I was not aware of it at the time. Thinking of it now, I think I was obsessed with such kind of thought. Especially in the area of studying...I had always wanted to do well at my study, and I had not been poor at it... It really captured my mind that I should go to a prestigious university and become a smart successful woman.

Growing up with such perspective, she said, "my self-understanding, the way I see myself was greatly shaped within school system." As an excellent *mobumsaeng* in class, she had always been recognized and loved by teachers, which became an important source of her self- identity in Korea.

However, her *mobumsaeng* identity in school and home did not always exert positive influences on her. She reflected:

> In school environment, if I could not achieve what I aimed at, I was not able to accept the result easily. I used to give a lot of pressure to myself as if it were the only way to be myself. Then I would be depressed, locking myself within my own criteria... Not only my mother, but also I myself was locked within a certain criteria. I was really closed. In terms of studying, rather than being a cheerful girl and being able to enjoy it, I always wanted to perform better, thinking that is only my way. If I could not do well, I become hard on myself regardless of my parents' feedback.
>
> Because of their (my parents) expectation, either consciously or unconsciously, I always thought I should be a person like that. I always had a kind of thought, 'if I work on one thing, I should do it well'. If not, I felt like I was in a big trouble. I think it still remains a bit in me. (laugh)

This view illustrated in the above statements was something that came up in our conversations as a recurring theme, which I also found she has struggled with and

changed over during her cross-cultural life. As will be explained shortly, Heejin's questioning and examining of the elitist educational values and competitiveness nurtured by her family and school life in Korea, has been the focus of a significant part of her identity reconstruction process in Canada.

University Admission Failures: from "*Mobumsaeng*" to "*Jaesusaeng*" Identity

At the end of her grade twelve year, Heejin faced an event that was tragic enough to shake her whole sense of identity, which was grounded firm on her successful school achievements: She failed to be accepted by the university that was her first choice. Of course, there were plenty of other universities that would admit her only if she had lowered her criteria. In fact, she was admitted to the university of her third choice, but the rank of that university did not satisfy her at all. She recalled: "At that time, I really did not want to go there. It was not the university I wanted. I also couldn't accept the fact that everything was decided by one big test. Thus I decided to do *jaesu* (studying one more year for the university entrance exam). " As a strong- willed and self- proud girl at least in the academic area, she could not imagine herself getting into a below-average university. From a third person's point of view, it may seem only a matter of choosing a university that her exam result fit in. But from her standpoint, it seemed like society's way of telling her who was worthy and who was not. Her idea of doing *jaesu* was also supported by her mother and teachers who believed that her academic talents deserved a better university label.

No matter how strong-willed she was in the beginning of *jaesu* life, Heejin found the reality of *jaesu* was too hard to take up. The difficulty arose not only out of the high-pressured studying condition of *jaesu*, but also from her feeling of loss and insecurity outside of school life. For the first time in her life, she was outside of the school fence, which, she soon realized, had been the whole base of her identity. She felt so lost: "When I was in school, I had always been a *mobumsaeng*, so people recognized me and teachers liked me. But when the system of school was gone, I could not know "who I am" any more." The sense of identity loss naturally accompanied a constant sense of insecurity, poor achievement in studying and the avoidance of any social relationships. She recalled, "I could not study well…More than that, I was not able to socialize myself at all. I had not been that kind of character, but strange enough, I could not make any friends at that time. I was always all alone."

When the result of *jaesu* turned out to be disastrous again at the end of the year, the sense of identity loss got worse, and considerable amounts of insecurity led her to a serious identity quest for the first time:

> I had lived by the prescribed curriculum, but what was the result of it? Who am I? I felt like I had lived my life not even knowing what I really wanted to do. I had been just catching up with what my parents and my teachers wanted me to do. I questioned, 'What is it that I want? Who am I?'

For the first time in her life, "I felt like I became a victim of our educational culture- the culture where if you are good in your study, you have your identity, if not, no identity," she said. Given her elitist way of thinking and competitiveness at the time, the repeated failure of the university entrance exam was probably the

hardest challenge for her big ego. Her long-held *mobumsaeng* identity was suddenly seen as something of a fool, and she felt indignation at this contradiction.

Studying Abroad: In Search of New and Better Opportunity

After the second failure of the university entrance exam, Heejin had to settle for another choice. But just when she was completely at a loss for the university selection, her mother suggested the idea of going to a university in Canada:

> She (my mom) knew how lost I was during my *jaesu* life. Then talking about Canada she had heard about, she suggested me that I study abroad there. I think my mom also had a great interest in immigrating into Canada those days. She would often join the Canada immigration fair. There, she heard that Canada has better educational system, safe and good environment. She believed that it would offer me better and new educational opportunity.

Her mother's suggestion shone a new guiding light to Heejin who was completely lost at the time, so she took it with all positive attitudes. Although her mother reminded her of a hundred thousand challenges waiting for her, the expectation of a new *uhak* life outweighed the fear of the challenges:

> I was excited rather than being scared. I had a certain admiration for foreign life. Also I wanted to run away from my reality, to be honest. So it was kind of *dopi* (runaway) *uhak*...but I had no alternative. Many of my friends who studied well went to the good universities at the time, and I wanted to run away from my constant comparisons of my life with their lives...I kept thinking myself as a victim of our educational culture

It seems that the negative image associated with *dopi* (runaway) *uhak* added to her sense of being victimized by the Korean educational system. It is true that many *uhaksaengs* like Heejin, who go abroad to make their way towards foreign universities after failing to get into Korean ones, have been the target of

severe criticism by Korean media for a long time. Named as "*dopi uhaksaengs*", they have been criticized for running away from the hard reality of Korean university entrance competition and trying to compensate for their deficient academic ability with valuable foreign currency. Although such criticism may stands valid for some cases of *uhaksaengs*, it seems hardly fair to me that the elitist and competitive educational culture of Korea simply labels them as "runaway" students, without the provision of better alternatives for them other than the road of "studying abroad". As Lee and Brinton (1996) point out, it is the widespread popular belief in Korean education that "a degree from a prestigious university is a minimum requirement for social success" (p. 177). So, going for a vocational college or a below average local university are not regarded as desirable choices for those who can afford to study abroad.

More importantly, it now seems an appalling irony to me that the Korean media appears so appreciative of the experience of "studying abroad in North America" while showing intolerance to "*dopi uhaksaengs*". Heejin said that she started to have a certain sense of admiration for the West after reading a book written by an *uhaksaeng* who returned to Korea with a degree from the Harvard. She remembered that the book had been very popular during her middle school days and had brought much admiration for studying abroad among her friends- when Heejin visited home later after her successful university admission in Canada, she remembered becoming a target of envy among her friends. There exists an interesting contrary attitude towards the experience of "studying abroad" before and after the experience, depending on one's success and accomplishments. This, I believe, has much to do with the privilege and power associated with the

experience of "studying abroad" and "English knowledge" in Korea. Heejin's pursuit of "studying abroad" and English language, like that of other Korean students, becomes a target of criticism because it is not just any educational opportunity and language but the ones that most people wish they could take and speak. The privilege of studying abroad in the West keeps giving *uhaksaengs* the edge over other students, providing better job opportunities, social respect, and economic return in Korea (Rhee, 2002). Had it been a less socially-admired opportunity, Heejin's pursuit of studying abroad may not have been seen as "runaway".

Although Heejin's grandfather and father were at first reluctant to send their precious first granddaughter/daughter abroad, Heejin knew that she would go study abroad anyhow. The partial objection and concerns of family soon diminished and the process of the visa application began. My suspicion is that her grandfather and father in any case would have thought that there could be no possible alternative or better way for them to think, for the sake of Heejin's future. While Heejin's family had different degrees of agreement towards the idea of her studying abroad, they were unified in their expectation that "there would be possible, different and better benefits in studying in North America" as Heejin said. Here unspoken message communicated is that English knowledge associated with studying abroad would secure Heejin a better future through educational/social success. Heejin left for Canada as soon as she got her student authorization two months later.

In Canada, During Cross- Cultural experiences

Initial Adjustment: Ongoing Identity Disorientation

Before her arrival in Canada, Heejin had already had a firm agenda for her first year of Vancouver life: "I will study hard and get into a university within a year". Although feeling burdened by studying in a second language, Heejin was more or less confident and positive about her English study: "I had no idea that there were so many Koreans in Vancouver. Also I never thought that it (studying in English) would be this tough," she laughs remembering her naïve optimism in her early days.

Even though her mother, who was concerned about Heejin's initial adjustment to Canada, told her to take time and just try to enjoy learning English at the ESL Institute for a while, it did not console Heejin's impetuous mind that she needed to find her place in a university as soon as possible:

> Despite what my mom said, I was always under great pressure that I had to go to university as soon as possible. I was depressed most of the time…As there was much time gap between high school graduation and university admission… as there was no place for me to belong, I became very intimidated…Thinking of it now, I wonder why I was in such a hurry. That did not give me any practical help. I should have enjoyed the moments. However, in those days, I was really impatient.

Heejin knew that most of her peers in Korea would be in their second or third years of university in the following year. As she was already two years behind her peers in Korea, she was reluctant to become more behind than that. Even though she found herself on the other side of the globe, her sense of competition was alive, and the value of "where you are tells who you are" was strong.

Since the moment she enrolled in the ESL program, she had aimed at getting a TOEFL score as soon as she could, a primary requirement for university

admission. "Whenever I got insufficient TOEFL score, I would go crazy", Heejin said. Much like Hyun's case, she was depressed most of university preparation time, and I remember often seeing her face shadowed with the heavy pressure in those days. Heejin needed to prove to herself as well as to others, for the sake of her dignity, that she was capable of finding her place in the university as soon as possible. Yet, the hard reality set in; the fact that there was no quick visible fruit of her efforts led her to a constant sense of insecurity and confusions about herself.

What increased her confusion was the sense of conflicts she felt in the area of her social life. In the beginning of Vancouver life, Heejin wanted to make as many Canadian friends as possible. Yet, it did not take long for her to realize that, like most participants in this study pointed out, there were not many opportunities to make Canadian friends. The people whom she could practice her English with were quite limited to her home-stay mother or a teacher at the ESL institute. A few months after her arrival in Vancouver, she found herself seeking to make friends with some other Asians such as Taiwanese and Japanese. Although she felt somewhat uneasy about the lack of communication with Canadians, she also felt it could not be helped.

Besides some friends from other Asian countries, Heejin also needed some Korean peers whom she could hang around with. After all, this was her first time to be away from home and she needed some friends with whom she could share her unique experiences as a Korean *uhaksaeng*, which could not be totally shared with either her Asian friends or family in Korea. Although there were many Korean *uhaksaengs* in her ESL school and downtown area, she found that most of them were older college-level students who were to stay in Vancouver for

a temporary period. It was not easy to meet her friends in her own age group with whom she could develop a long-term friendship. Yet, a few months later, fortunately Heejin was able to meet a girl called, Ju, whose background was similar to her own. The fellowship with Ju allowed Heejin to avoid a total alienation and loneliness outside of school, but with much confusion on Heejin's side. Heejin soon found that her valuable friend led quite a different lifestyle from that of her own. Unlike Heejin who was a typical *mobumsaeng*, Ju was a fun-loving person. Having an army of friends around her, Ju liked to hang around with them anytime and to head off to bars or clubs in search of fun. Heejin was often invited to those social gatherings and she was shocked by the different lifestyles she encountered there:

> While meeting different people and friends, I wondered how I should accept them: Is it okay to be close with them? In Korea, I would have thought that I should not get close to those who drink or smoke at my age. Yet when I got to know them better, I found that not all of them were as bad as I thought. Also, as the life I have pursued had not bore me a good result, I became more suspicious if I had taken a wrong track… I wanted to find another self in me… Once I was quite shocked when my close friend started to smoke in Karaoke. Yet I had to pretend not to be shocked…Meanwhile, I would regret over the lifestyle I had led.

One of the unique experiences of Korean *uhaksaengs* might be that they could meet different people from various backgrounds, whom they would never imagine to associate with if they remained in Korea. As Heejin put, "there were invisible social grouping between people in Korea. Even in university, students find themselves have more or less similar backgrounds with one another. But here we could meet various people." When one encounters with different people, who have different background and values, it could seriously challenge and question

the validity of values and worldview one had kept. Taylor (1989) describes this as the phenomenon of identity disorientation:

> To have an identity is to know "where you're coming from" when it comes to questions of value, or issues of importance. Your identity defines the background against which you know where you stand on such matter. To have that called into question, or fall into uncertainty, is not to know how to react and this is to cease to know who you are in this ultimately relevant sense (pp. 305-306).

Heejin's eyes awoke to difference when she came to Vancouver, initially through the differences between cultures, but more explicitly though the differences that existed between people. As a person who had grown up with "*a mobumsaeng*" identity in Korea, Heejin's first involvement with the friend like Ju made her question her own values and prejudices against people who have a different lifestyle from hers. This, with a sense of bitter disappointment with her status outside of university, often left her in an on-going sense of identity disorientation.

University Life: Insecurities and Loneliness

When I asked Heejin what good memories she had when reflecting on her *uhaksaeng* life, she responded to me that the acceptance to the university was the only good memory she could recall. She said:

> I took a TOEFL a month before the application deadline. My score was just around the passing mark those days. I just gave it one more try and then I got the sufficient score. I was so delighted and I submitted it as soon as I get it. As my application submission was caught on due day, I was really nervous. After all I was accepted. I was so happy at that time.

Having been away from the school system for more than two years, which was an important source of her identity, Hejin felt a huge amount of security when she received the entry into UBC. "People around me began to say to me, 'Your face

has been totally changed'," Heejin laughs. Brightened by her joy during the short period between the admission news and the beginning of university years, there was no question that Heejin enjoyed the social prestige of becoming a UBC student: The surprised look on people's face and comments such as "you made it in a year and half? You've done a good job," tickled her ego.

Yet soon inside the university, she felt increasingly out of place. It did not take long for her to realize that she was not ready enough for the academic life. Most of all, she found that her academic English ability was too far behind for her to catch up with all the lectures and their required readings and assignments. She recalled, "Thinking of it now, I was not really ready. As I was studying in English, and it was academic, I should have paid more attention to academic ability such as writing." However, during the first semester, she was still too excited to become serious about the lack of her academic English ability. She thought that once she got into a good university, things would work out somehow. In that sense, she inherited most Koreans' belief in prestigious institution and approached her new studying as if she studied in Korea:

> At that time, I was just delighted. I had no plans for further studies . . . I did not know how to study practically. I did not have any thinking such as, 'I should study like this.. I should catch up like this'...Maybe I was not really aware of how studying here is different from studying in Korea. Or even though I sensed the difference a bit, I still studied in the way I used to study in Korea. I would do cramming a night before exam day.

In addition to her lack of academic English ability and the Korean approach to the North American academy, another problem contributed to her poor adjustment to university life: her lack of knowledge of the Canadian university system. For instance, even the very first task of course selection in the

beginning of each semester had always been confusing to her. She had a vague interest in psychology in the first year, so signed up for a course related to it. Then, when she soon found the workload of the course was way over her head, she was at a loss for what to do. She did not even know the fact that she could drop or withdraw from the course. After failing a course in the first semester, she decided to take just two courses per semester: After all she was studying in her second language and needed more time to catch up on the readings and assignments. But, the university calendar could not wait for her. She soon found that taking two courses a semester caused a serious timetable conflict in the next semester because some courses required prerequisites. This led her to constantly wander from course to course.

When I asked her if she had ever looked for help from the university through advisory or counseling programs, she sounded quite pessimistic about school support:

> Here in this culture, you should take care of yourself. Otherwise, you face a lot of problems. Of course, there was a counseling program there, but it was just superficial. When I visited there, they told me different things. They told me just to go to each department of my interest and to talk to the people there. I went there to discuss with the possible options I could take in choosing my major, but they just told me to go to each department. I was at a loss... Here everything is individualized, they just don't know one another well. Then if they are not sure, they pass the buck to each other. And they don't care at all if they are not in charge.

As a person who grew up in a collective society, where people have less sense of boundary between their own duties and others', Heejin had difficulty understanding the individualized work system of university and found it difficult to get any extra support from it. Perhaps many things seemed to be "a common

sense" from Canadian point of view, but they were never clearly spelled out to her and she learned them the hard way.

Compared to academic work, her social life outside of classes was even harder, she said. Much like Hyun, she had suffered from a bitter sense of loneliness for a long time:

> I was really really lonely. As I did not go to university in Korea, I am not sure about this... But I know that, in Korean universities, they hang around together, they have lots of social meetings. But here people are so individualized... I had to go to library and have lunch all alone... Staying alone was really hard.

In the beginning of university life, she thought that she would mingle with as many Canadians as possible, but she soon found that the university life conditions such as large classes, busy course work, and individualized life styles of Canadian peers made it difficult for her to make much social life with Canadian friends. This was compounded by the language and ethnicity factors. Lacking in fellow native speakers of English with whom she could practice English comfortably, Heejin was reluctant to speak English inside and outside of school. Although she thought that she should be more active in speaking English, she found herself never initiating contact in English. Her introspective character no doubt played a part here. But more importantly, she attributed her lack of integrative motivation to the tendency of "birds of a feather flock together" in university classes: "White gathers with white and colors gather with colors." From her point of view, at the core of these groups were white Anglo-Saxon Canadians, who owned the language and culture of Canadian society; all the rest were in their own peripheral places. This was the image of Canada, the cultural mosaic in the eyes of Heejin. She said:

> I thought I should change my peripheral place into the mainstream in the beginning, but now... I accept it naturally. I no longer thinking of making a change...Because I feel more comfortable with this... Maybe this is Canada. Different people live together and maintain their own lifestyles...That is the culture here.

As a Korean who felt more comfortable to remain ethnic, she tried to seek friendship and emotional support in her Korean world. At that time she was going to a Korean church and had many chances to meet with other Korean ESL *uhaksaengs*. Yet, she did not find it easy to make long- lasting friendships there. She attributed it to the different studying conditions between ESL students and long-term *uhaksaengs*. Compared to university *uhaksaengs*, ESL students had less tight schedules in their study and more chances to hang around with one another. But as a university student who bore a heavy workload of school assignments and readings, Heejin often found it difficult to join gatherings of fellow *uhaksaengs*. That intensified her sense of alienation:

> As I often missed out many gatherings... You know, people should meet each other frequently to get to know each other better. So they could have more conversations. Yet, as I often could not join such gatherings, I felt a kind of alienation from them... I could hardly experience a true fellowship... I had always been hungry for such relationship though.

Hungry for fellowship as she was, it was understandable that she could not afford time and efforts to build such solid relationships. It was a reality that, with her English ability, she needed double the time that others needed to catch up with her studies. More than that, the sense of conflicts over her social life made it hard for her to generate any extra effort to make deeper friendship: Although she did not actively engage in the English world, she also felt somewhat guilty about her lack of English use. As much as she sought comfortable friendship and social life

from the Korean world, she also felt much discomfort about her seclusion from English use and little fellowship with host nationals.

Behind all these conflicts, there was a strong sense of insecurity about her future and fear of failure. She recalled her mind at that time:

> I knew that I could not go back to Korea. What could I do there? I could not do *jaesu* again. I think I was desperate at that time… This (finishing university in Canada) seemed the only way for me. So I suffered from the fear of 'what if I can't make it?'

At the end of her second year at UBC, her *uhak* life in Vancouver turned out to be very different from the expectations she had in Korea. Heejin believed that studying abroad would provide her with better space to be more or other than what she could find herself to be in Korea. Yet, what she found in *uhak* life was the self who was still constantly suffering from the sense of failure and loneliness as she used to be in Korea. She also found herself trying to grasp the future that would never happen in a sense: as she said, "Before university, I thought that everything would be fine once I could get into the university". Yet, in the university, she realized what a naïve optimism it was. Meanwhile, deep inside of her, she badly missed the world where she could enjoy her "here and now".

Boyfriend: Source of Perspective Change

When Heejin was going through this period of loneliness and insecurity at UBC, she came to meet her boyfriend, Sungwon. They started to go out when Heejin had to transfer from UBC to one local college, one of the hardest times for Heejin. Most of their friends and I all assumed that their relationship was doomed. Heejin was planning to finish her undergraduate program in Vancouver and Sung

won, who came to Vancouver for ESL training, was going to move to the United States to pursue his undergraduate program there. But their relationship proved far more resilient than any of us had predicted. Sung won decided to stay and went to a college in Vancouver. He has still remained as Heejin's true confident, providing the continuing relationship she had badly thirsted for during her time of disillusionment with university life and intense solitude.

As Heejin described Sungwon, Sungwon is a different person from Heejin in terms of family and education background:

> He came from very different family atmosphere, under the parents who have very different thoughts (from mine). Of course his parents do not ignore the importance of education. But sometimes they seemed so to my eyes, for I was brought up giving such a high priority on one's education. Before, I often wondered why his parents have let him do whatever he wants to do. But now I see it differently; I think it is desirable... They have respected and built up his interests and talents, never pushing him to study... It may be wrong to do much of it... Anyhow, he is so different from me.

Two years older than Heejin, Sungwon had not gotten his undergraduate degree yet. Just leaving one more semester to graduate university in Korea, he left Korea to pursue his undergraduate program again in America. By the time they started to go out, Sungwon was taking ESL courses at a college. Compared to his Korean peers, most of whom already finished their university education and had settled down with a job, Sungwon was quite far behind. Yet, he was a very stable and confident person. Heejin said:

> Many *uhaksaengs* suffer a sense of inferior complex in one way or another, but it is well taken care of in his case. He has a stable and confident self-identity, so that even when he is challenged about it by others, he seems to be able to take the challenges in stride... In my case, it has been always much of struggles. As he was different from me in this respect...in terms of self identity...I feel very comfortable talking with him.

It is this sense of comfort that Heejin felt was so special about Sungwon. In his self- confidence, Heejin could project the sunny side of herself, which she wanted to make as her true-self, rather than the socially inept, often depressed character she seemed to be cast into at the time. Despite their many differences, Sungwon understood Heejin's experiences and struggles very well, providing the comfort and courage she longed for.

Although their relationship has been developing for a long time- almost four years by the time I had these interviews with Heejin, Heejin had not been able to inform her parents of her relationship with Sungwon until a year ago. Heejin's mother only had known a little about Sungwon and kept their relationship a secret from her father. Both Heejin and her mother knew that her father would not be happy with Sungwon, because of his educational background. When I asked her if there had been any change in her parents' knowledge or response about their relationship, she told me that her father was informed about their relationship recently, however, that her parents had rarely asked or showed interest about their relationship. It was always Heejin who had to initiate the conversation about Sungwon. Heejin took her parents' seemingly ignorance as their discredit to the man whom she was dating while living far away from home in times of extreme loneliness. She also knew that such a response from parents was an indirect way to disapprove of their children's relationship. Considering the value they have put on one's educational background, she knew that her parents would have a difficult time accepting Sungwon as a prospective son-in-law.

In fact, Heejin, too, passed through a time of conflict related to her boyfriend's educational background. Although she loved his cheerful spirit and

self-competence, part of her reluctantly agreed with her parents' idea, saying "my future spouse should have at least the same educational level as I have". This particularly concerned her because they both were planning to go back to Korea as soon as Heejin finished her undergraduate program. Sungwon had little educational aspiration himself; he was thinking of quitting school, going back to Korea with Heejin and taking over his father's business there. A husband with no bachelor degree…she was not sure if she liked the idea.

> I don't mean to blame my parents for this… but because of the value system I had grown up with … the expectations of my mother... I could not help thinking of them…Due to the influence my parents had on me, I was expecting the person who had the same level of education as me… Yes, I was back and forth between my thoughts.

Why doesn't life live up to the ideal picture she and her parents dreamed of when she came to Canada? You get yourself in a frenzy of entering a prestigious university only to find yourself feeling out of place; you meet someone and fall in love but he can't meet the kind of expectation you and your parents have. Up until the *uhak* and the meeting with Sungwon, understanding one's identity in Heejin's world was epitomized by her parents and grandparents, who tied it mainly to one's educational success and the social power it implied. But living herself on their value of education and achievement did not seem to bring her happiness. This led her to question the whole point of perceiving one's identity as the way her parents did it. In our conversations, she was expressing the change that had occurred in her perspective:

> Before I came to Canada, I saw and treat people with my own bias. But now here I think I came to have a mind to see the heart of the people… The thoughts that one should graduate a good school…such thought has been changed. Yes, compared to before, it was really changed.

> When I have my own children, when I think of how I will raise them... I want to be different from typical mothers in Korea. I want to give them some freedom and space...in order to know what they really like to do and pursue them. I wanted them to experience different things, rather than force them to study.

This perception of identity portrays an important change that took place inside Heejin during the later part of her *uhak* life. Her perspective change inspired by the relationship with her boyfriend has become more solid as she began to engage in the spiritual part of her life to a deeper level in Vancouver.

Spiritual Life: The Process of Identity Reorientation

After two years at UBC, Heejin transferred to a local college in Vancouver. Part of the reason for the movement was that Heejin kept finding herself wandering from course to course, not being able to adjust to the UBC. But the main reason was that she could not pass the LPI (Language Proficiency Index), which kept her from taking more courses there. It is said that language is the house of being. It was no surprise that she felt out of place at the school, where English became increasingly the language of humiliation and frustration for her. However, as a person who still had a strong credit in a prestigious educational institution at the time, the process of transfer was a hard reality for her.

However, the time of tribulation often turns out as a disguised mask for new opportunities. As she started to take courses at a local college, she began to feel more comfortable with her academic life and to build a sense of confidence in her studies. According to her, the studies at a local college felt much easier because of its interactive and friendly atmosphere. The closer relationship with teachers and students in a small class context gave her a sense of security, which

she needed most in order to cope with her studies. Also, as mentioned above, the relationship with her boyfriend began at this time and provided the strength for her to overcome her depressed self.

Along with smoothened college life and her boyfriend's mental support, her spiritual life became another source that contributed to her stability. Although she went to a Christian high school, religious life had not much influenced her in Korea, she said. Yet, the influence had subtly permeated her inner world during her puberty, so that she would question what religious faith could mean to her in those days. However, busy and competitive school/*jaesu* life made it difficult for her to engage in such questions to a deeper level until she came to Vancouver. Then, in Vancouver, she began to attend a Korean church every Sunday, and her steadfast spiritual life came to have some influence on her, especially in terms of her self-understanding. In fact, going through the experiences of finding herself constantly shaken up and split by her circumstances, she has been constantly questioning the basis of her identity since the early stage of her spiritual life:

> My identity had been defined mainly by what others thoughts of me. Yet I thought that it should not be. It should be found here, somewhere inside me, rather than my outward circumstances. While looking for it, I think I have experienced God in a new way.

Until her *uhak* life, Heejin had to compare herself constantly to others through Korean standards of success and worry about how others would evaluate her. However, her renewed spiritual life began to give her the strength to free herself from the persuasive cultural voice that she needed to do or achieve something well to prove to others her self-worth. The system of valuation based on one's educational or career success, which was nourished in her upbringing, began to be

seriously challenged and deconstructed: "I became convinced that how much I am being loved by beginning to understand my identity as a Christian, as a child of God" "As my faith deepens, I came to love myself more, and I became less concerned about others' evaluation of my backgrounds."

More interestingly, her deepened spiritual life has led her to get beyond her self-importance. As she began to see the intrinsic value in herself, she began to see it inherent in others as well. She shared:

> A change made in me by my spiritual life was that I came to look beyond 'the life only for me'... not just making my life rich and well... I came to think I should care for the lives of others. Of course, because of my busy school life, I sometimes feel conflicted to do it. Still, I know that I should look after others.
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> To the people around me... I think I have been very proud to them. I did not realize how important they were. I think I was very proud in terms of the relationships. Of course, we often experience stress and difficulty in our relational life, yet we learn a lot from it.

Bauman (1996) notes that we think of identity whenever we are not sure of where we belong. He claims that "identity is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty" (p19). As Heejin was able to locate herself to the Being and a friend who were willing to accept her for who she was, she seemed less preoccupied with her sense of self- identity.

Future Anticipation

Rethinking the Meaning of *Uhak* Life

After two years at a college, Heejin transferred to Simon Fraser University. Taking courses there, she is now hoping to graduate from this school by next fall. When asked about her school life at SFU, she said that she was still struggling with her English and sometimes felt pressured if her graduation might be further

delayed because of her slow pace of studying. Yet, she sounded a lot more light-hearted about her school life than ever. She said "I decided to lay down my obsessive idea of 'I still couldn't graduate'. I want to enjoy my study while doing my best." Indeed, reflecting on her previous experiences in schools, she often added comments such as "I should not have been such pressured at the time," or "I should have enjoyed my studies those days".

Heejin's comments reveal her awareness of the futility involved in her attempts to ground herself into some indefinite future achievements. As a matter of fact, most of her *uhaksaeng* life has been, in a way, chasing after a "better tomorrow" by seeking her educational achievement which she believed would make her feel more secure and real. However, through her years of restless *uhak* life and changing perspective on identity, she seemed to realize what she had missed out in her perpetual future-orientation. She now decided to value her own pace of studying and enjoy her present *uhak* life.

As Heejin came to terms with herself and her *uhak* life, she also seemed to be able to come to terms with her past experiences. In fact, the past life of *uhaksaeng* has been a life of insecurity and failures rather than that of success. The fact that she was an *uhaksaeng* and second language speaker often seemed to her to do nothing but to generate her inferior existence in the academic world and bitter loneliness in the social world. But I noticed that she recently came to see the positive aspect of her experiences. For instance, regarding her status as a second language speaker, she once pointed out the possible advantage of it:

> I really want to speak English well. Speaking English... it has been the most difficult thing in my uhak life. However, as English is my second language, because I need to think more about what I want to say...I think I

> can speak it in more cohesive way than native speakers. I am able to express key points in a brief and clear way. Maybe that is an advantage of second language speaker.

Concerning her lonesome and conflicted experiences of social life, too, she said that she now could see new meanings of it:

> Here I met many different people, whom I would probably have never met if I had been in Korea. Of course I often had a lot of stress and difficult time with people, but I know that I learned a lot from the experiences… With such experiences of mine, I think I can help those who are going through tough time in their *uhaksaeng* life. I really want to do that (laugh)

Although she is able to make some peace with her past experiences and focus on her present, I also know that she still feels somewhat insecure and ambiguous about what the past several years spent in Canada could mean to her when she returns home someday. In the practical realm, she was not sure if her English is ready enough to meet the expectations that her home society has for *uhaksaengs*.

> As I had this privilege of studying in foreign country…You know that, in Korea, when we apply for a job, the companies highly value the experience of studying abroad. When they see my resume, they naturally would think, 'this person must speak good English'. Yet, you know, this (Vancouver) is not the kind of place you can master English even though you live here for a long time. However, people in Korea would expect a lot about my English, and they would see it as my ability. Because, how much English you speak… it becomes your ability in Korea. Thinking of it, I am not sure how much ability I can display there.

It seems to me that her words portray the plight of many Korean *uhaksaengs* who don't believe that they can live up to the fancy image of *uhaksaengs* in Korean society. I remember Samgi once telling me, "it seems like our society believes that if you study abroad, everything related to English would work out". Measuring up to such societal expectations seems to be no small challenge to Heejin as she does not feel confident in her English.

Besides the lack of confidence in her English, I can also see that there is a deeper and more essential sense of lack working behind her insecure mind about her home return. She feels more of herself through the change she has experienced by living in Canada for the last six years, yet she is doubtful how much her change could be understood and shared with the family and others when she returns home country. In other words, she does not feel at home in her home country any more. In fact, her last couple of home visits seemed to provide the sense of loss. In our last conversation, she shared:

> Of course, I like Korea. I love to get back together with my family. But, it is strange that I felt difficult to be there. I felt uncomfortable there, so that I sometimes wonder if it might be better for me to stay here. Have you ever felt that way?
>
> I now know that it is impossible for me to go back home as the way I used to be…Although my family may expect some change in me, their memory is still confined to the "old me". That's why I feel some discomfort there. Sometimes I am not sure whether I should go back or not.

Listening to Heejin, I was reminded of my own home returning experiences and struggles. I also recalled a comment from a professor when I shared such experiences in one graduate seminar: "You become one of the homeless now, right?" For a long time, the comment has remained in me, and now as I write this, I ponder over if *uhaksaengs* like me and Heejin do become "a homeless" as he pointed out. From my point of view, Yes and No: Yes, because there is no such thing as home waiting for *uhaksaengs* like Heejin and me. Through the years of being away from home, we change and evolve. In Heejin's case, when she came to Canada, she said that she believed that she could make a "better self and better future" by acquiring English and making academic achievement in North America. But here she underwent some reorientation to her

ideas of "good": what is important and what makes her life meaningful (Taylor, 1989, p.4). She realized that what was good for her parents was not necessarily good for her. In this regard, she would never feel "at-homeness" on her return.

However, after years of cross-cultural experiences, I cannot help thinking that home is the place we choose and create, rather than the place that is given to us. Nothing is further from the paradoxical truth: "There is no place like home". There is no ready- made home waiting for us, but there is no place as sweet as home when we create one for ourselves. From this perspective, I believe that we never become homeless as long as we are engaged in the hard labor of creating home. Perhaps what we desire is the consistent moments of assurance that we have a place that we belong to, however loaded it is with personal, historical and cultural burdens. For a long time, I thought of how cross-cultural experiences make it difficult for us to feel at home in our home-country, because, to the extent that our identities have been changed by cross-cultural experiences, we must renegotiate our relationships with our home culture. However, my graduate studies and recent journey through this research have taught me that, because of our cross-cultural experience and identity change, which helped us to take a journey into our past and our own culture with better insight, then we are also privileged to go back home and recreate ourselves in a healthier and more compassionate way (Smith, 1995). Writing this, I could not help smiling at what Heejin lastly shared with me about her big wish for the future:

> To be honest, what I really want for future is my own home. I want to have my own family and children that I can love and care for (laugh). I know that I should do something else too with all this educational training, but… to build a home, to make a healthy and peaceful family…that is my greatest wish.

Chapter 7, Minji

Introduction

Minji was the only participant whom I had not known before I began the interviews for this study. I had known the other three participants either through the university or the church I attended. Yet, Minji was a total stranger until my husband introduced her to me, recommending her as a possible research participant. At that time, having the other three participants- Kyuhyun, Samgi, Heejin- involved in my research, I was looking for one more participant who is female, non- religious, and as Canadian culture-oriented as possible. As the other three participants have somewhat similar experiences in terms of their religious background and bicultural social life, I wanted to find someone who may have different experiences. As it turned out, it was not easy for me to find any *uhaksaengs* who weren't involving with any local churches or Korean communities, and associating predominantly with host nationals. With the rising number of *uhaksaengs* and immigrants in Vancouver - so is the number of Korean churches. It seems that most *uhaksaengs* these days tend to associate with local churches or other Korean communities at least to some degree. Having become acquainted with Minji through his summer job, my husband recommended Minji probably as someone who was as Canadian-culture-oriented and non-religious as one could get in Vancouver. She doesn't go to church, and hangs around mostly with her Canadian boyfriend and his family, my husband said. I admit that these things about Minji attracted my interest and motivated me to contact and invite her to this research project.

Before I met Minji, I must admit that I had a certain prejudice about her. In my mind, I had an image of kind of a very westernized looking girl who hangs around with a Canadian boyfriend for the sake of fun or English practice. Also, how to develop a trustful conversational relationship with this virtual stranger concerned me before our first meeting. However, from the very first meeting, destroying my prejudice and concern, Minji came to me in an open and unpretentious way with her very approachable character. Strange to think how she has changed from a virtual stranger back then to one of the friends I feel closest to in my life now. I could have never anticipated the kind of openness and dedication she has shared with me during our interviews.

Just why she became so dedicated in my interviews was a puzzle to me during the first couple of interviews, but as we continued meeting I soon understood the reason why. If anyone in this study needed the kind of conversations and reflection it offered, it was Minji. After three years of *uhaksaeng* life, she was struggling most with her bitter sense of loneliness. When the interviews came her way, she welcomed it as a refuge from her loneliness and then as a place to share her stories of heart. However, I also confess that it was not only Minji but also me who appreciated the kind of sharing, tears and laugher we had in the interviews. By the time I had meetings with Minji, with the workload of research on one hand, and with the heavy pressure of other requirements in my personal life on the other, I was about to fall into a certain mannerism and tempted to do research just as another mandatory academic requirement. Yet, the conversations with Minji helped me to get out of such temptation and to witness how research could be integrated into my everyday

reality. I gratefully learned that this research that stemmed from our shared lives has bounced back to serve our real lives as well.

In Korea, Before Foreign Journey

Imagined Enchantment of West

When Minji and I had the first interview, Minji had been in Vancouver for almost one year. She had been taking TOFEL classes at a college and preparing herself to get into a regular academic program. Before her arrival in Vancouver, she also had been in Toronto for one and a half years. Among my four participants, Minji left Korea at the youngest age- at nineteen- and probably with the most admiration for the West. "Coming to a foreign country[18] and going to school here was the dream of my life in Korea" she said. She has dreamed of coming to a foreign country since she was a junior high school student. Yet, a tough family budget made it impossible for her to pursue her dream, leaving her only option to be moving into one of the local high schools in her hometown. In her high school days, however, she already had no intention to go to university in Korea. She was resolved to leave for America and pursue her college education there as soon as she finished high school. "I used to think that 'people living in a foreign country look happier and better, and it must be more fun to live there than to live in Korea'," she said.

[18] In our conversations, Minji used the word of "foreign" and "North America" interchangeably. Foreign country was the same meaning as West to her, which I believe manifests an "imperialism of Western culture and knowledge" in her worldview that connects the West as cultural centrality over all other cultures and nations.

When I asked how she came to have such a big admiration for a foreign country, she responded that it was derived from the movies, pop songs, and the world-news she experienced during her childhood and adolescent years, she said:

> My brothers and uncle liked watching movies very much. My uncle, when he visited our home, he used to rent many foreign movies and watch with us. Although I am not quite sure when I started to have this admiration for a foreign life… Well, do you remember that they showed many American movies on Weekend Movie Program on TV? Watching them influenced me a lot, I believe. Maybe that's not a big deal, but it put an yeast on my dream to this extent. Through the movies, I learned that there are people who think and live differently from the ways we live in Korea. Their lives looked more advanced and happier than ours. That attracted me and developed my certain imagination about such countries. Also, they looked more handsome and prettier than us (laugh).

It is interesting how her early experiences with American TV programs and movies contributed to her imagined enchantment with America and its culture. According to Kim's study (2002) on the effects of English in current Korean society, the media plays a major role in the construction of perceptions and attitudes of Korean youth towards American culture. She points out that through the U.S media such as movies and TV programs, the status of U.S. as the nation of power and prosperity is perceived as "better" by many Korean youth, which puts American culture in a superior position to Korean culture (p.159). In Minji's case, it was evident that her exposure to American media had a large impact on her perception of "superior U.S" and built her admiration for a foreign country.

The fantasies towards a foreign country were more concretized and glamorized in her high school days through her experiences with an American English teacher at school:

> I think that, in my school life, that native English teacher had the greatest influence on me. I used to follow him anywhere and studied English harder… I came to like English much better… He was 180 centimeter tall,

> good-looking, a college student from New York... As I had a big admiration for foreign country, the experience of having a native English teacher... it made my imagination look more realistic...I was so excited and curious.
>
> I think he really made me get into English language and determined to study abroad... In a way, the experience of having a native English teacher puffed my dream. Because even if I had an admiration for foreign countries, if I don't feel any excitement when seeing foreigners, living in a foreign country would be just same as living in my country. But in my case, when I saw my English teacher, I loved to talk to him, approach him, and learn from him by any means. Thus, I thought that, with my aspiration, living abroad would be much fun and that I would do better there. Also, I think I felt happy while the teacher was in our school. I felt so good. Whether at home and school, I was making English sentences and think of what questions I would ask of him.

The image of a teen-age girl that emerges from her story who has a great admiration for foreign life came as a bit of a surprise to me. Although the admiration of English language and North American culture might not be an uncommon occurrence - either consciously or unconsciously- among Korean people (Rhee, 2002), Minji's admiration of an English teacher and enchantment with a foreign country sounded exceptional to me. When I expressed my surprise with curiosity, she attributed her admiration of a foreign country to the "openness" she felt about the country: "Through the movies, music, and magazines, I felt people there are more-open minded while our people have many biases," said she. When I asked the meaning of 'more open-minded', she explained:

> When they think and act, they do what they believe, not worrying much about the eyes of others as we Koreans do. It is kind of this idea- if I don't harm you, you don't mind my business. I think that's more open- minded. Also in foreign countries, they don't discriminate people by their educational background. They value people's experiences rather than their educational background. I liked that. And, I don't think our country is really open for women. When they see women, they look at which university she graduated from and whether or not she would make herself

> as a good bride... Well, maybe I say this because when you realize the existence of different lifestyle and culture, you are prone to be more critical about your own culture. Anyhow, I thought foreign country would suit me better than Korea.

According to Phillipson (1992), media and teachers exported as cultural products from the West to non-English speaking nations tend to portray a certain type of culture, and therefore students in non-English speaking countries are likely to be assimilated to the culture without any critical understanding or reflection. Minji's statements reminded me of this current trend of "Americanization of Korean students, who are led to think and act according to the norms of others (West) which they consider more modernized, civilized and superior than their own" (Kim, 2002, p.38).

During our first couple of interviews, how Minji's criticism against Korean culture and the idea of "foreign countries are better for me" had been contextualized and validated in her upbringing was a curiosity to me. However, I believed that these stories would come out naturally in our later conversations, and surely they did as Minji and I came to engage in deeper conversations. As will be explained shortly in the next section, her culturally gendered position and competitive school life have also affected the ways she imagined and dreamed of the "better West".

A Daughter in a Patriarchal Family

As I wrote above, Minji's travel to Canada was inflamed with the fantasies, excitement, and adventurous spirits she had nurtured in relation to a new foreign/U.S. culture through American media and English use. Her imagination

and fantasy of that foreign country were also imbued with her memories of the unequal treatment of woman she experienced in her patriarchal family. Although Minji's father was a generous family man who devoted his life to raising and educating three children, he was a typical conservative Korean man, she said. "He always had this way of thinking – woman should do this or that. My brothers are now a bit like him. They used to and still tell me, 'How dare woman could do such things?'" She recalled:

> My father was kind of man who thinks that women should live with a given life. He used to tell me neither to become too small nor too big one. He used to be against my idea of going to a different world and adventuring into something new. Maybe he knew how tough it would be… he used to tell me, 'such life is hard for you'.

Despite her father's warning, deep in Minji's mind, the admiration and adventurous spirits kept growing, fed by anger and resentment to the many injustices she thought Korean women were subjected to in the society. In her eyes, her mom was a typical model who experienced such unfairness. She said:

> I always feel pity on my mom. My mom really went through a lot. As my dad was the first son in his family and lost his father in his childhood, my mom raised my four uncles. She got married at the age of nineteen and had tough time bringing up my uncles and her own three children. My mom always took care of household, never taking a vacation with my dad… She always stayed at home taking care of us.
>
> I still remember that day… well, it may not be a big deal to others, but… you know that we do *gimgang*[19] in Korea. One day, I saw my mom doing *gimgang* in a cold and snowy day. She was all alone… My brothers were in their bedroom, watching TV with their bodies covered with a warm blanket. When I saw that…Even though my mom felt so cold outside, she had to keep washing cabbages all alone. I thought to myself, 'this is too unfair… although we are Korean women… we are human, too. Why don't my brothers need to help her out, staying their feet warm? This is unfair.'

[19] Preparing *Kimchi* for the winter

Such memories of her mother motivated Minji enough to seek a different life path from that of her mother. "My mom might have been contented with her life supporting my father and her three children… Yet I had a wish like… that I want to lead a different life. While my mom just took one road, I wanted to try many other roads." And the wish seemed to be possible to fulfill only by leaving the country because she could foresee what kind of life she might be led to in her future as a girl growing up in a patriarchal family in a small countryside of Korea, she said. In this light, her travel to Canada was, as she expressed, "a way of seeking the freedom of life", the freedom from the social restriction and inequality, which she believed Korean women were subjected to. Hoping to leave the prescribed position assigned to her as a country girl in Korea, Minji had been determined from an early age to recompose herself in what she believed was the "more open-minded and fair society of the West". Now her primary goal of studying in Canada is to be able to have a successful career through university education and to invite her mother to Canada someday. Minji's father passed away when she was in a junior high-school, and her widow mother lived alone in her hometown. Minji said:

> Now my wish is to have my own career after finishing university here and become a successful career woman. Then I want to invite my mom here and live with her. I want to take her to the movies and trips. There are many things I want to show to her. There are many worlds I want to show her around. I want to say, 'Mom, see! There is a different world like this. A different people like these.'

Competition among Friends: The Rejection of Interpersonal Relationships

In addition to her culturally gendered position, the experience of competitive and collectivistic school life had also affected Minji's imagination

and admiration for a foreign country. When I asked Minji how she would describe herself in Korea, she described her child self as a loner who was popular with teachers because she was a good student (in terms of studying) and not popular among friends because she was loved by many teachers. She was appointed as either a representative or a vice- representative of her class throughout elementary school and middle school. In Korea, a student who is academically bright, and loved by many teachers, is liable to become the target of peer jealousy. I think that this gets quite close to the Minji in Korea. "In Korea, I was not a type of girl who keeps many friends. I did not like that", she said." "I was an introspective person. Still I feel shy a lot and afraid of people."

When I heard this, it was somewhat difficult for me to trace such a girl in the Minji I saw: even through a few meetings, I could sense that she was a highly articulate and sociable person. When I said this, she mumbled: "Ah, maybe I had been like that a long time ago… but changed since when…" Then she reluctantly shared with me an incident when she was fooled by a group of friends, her competitors, in her junior high school days: One day after school, a group of friends followed Minji to the school washroom and locked the door. They soon started to bully her and confronted her leadership, saying "we heard that you told a teacher such and such a thing. Who do you think you are, saying such things to a teacher?" Since that incident, she became very conscious of the eyes of others. Also she had become afraid of making any close friendships or social relationships: "Since then, I've become kind of afraid of people. I worry so much about how others might think of me. They might consider me as a bad person. Also I don't tell others what to do. Just suit yourself". This is something that came

up repeatedly in our conversation as a personal conviction of hers and that I believe affected her desire to leave Korea and go abroad.

Competitive school life provides a powerful recipe for turning friends into enemies. Sadly enough, it often breeds in us a certain fear of engaging in meaningful relationships and expressing ourselves as the way we are. Listening to her bitterness over this memory, I could not help thinking that Minji had deserted what she believed was her authentic self and distanced herself from any meaningful friendships for a long time. When I shared this, Minji responded: "Yes, it is true… But since then… I could not help concerning a lot about others- such as what others would think of me if I do things this way or that way. If I make a mistake, I worry if people might gossip behind my back." She continues:

> At the time, I was just crying on the washroom floor. I was like a fool… I never expected they would be against me like that…Even if I could meet them again, I would never speak to them. I would pretend as if I had not known them. I can't forgive them. Just thinking of why they did that to me, what I have done? (crying)

Watching her cry over the memory of ten years ago, I realized how a small incident like that could damage a young girl's sense of self- esteem and have lasting effects. Since then, the idea of "I have nobody but family" "No friends are good" has taken a root in her mind. This, entangled with her fantasy of the foreign world, inflamed her desire to go abroad:

> I really hated going to school. I think the incidents influenced me a lot. In my mind, I just wished I could quit the school and go abroad. I thought a lot about making money and studying abroad. Yet, I had to be patient because I knew I had to finish high school first.

Similar to Samgi, she managed her difficult times by cultivating the dream of running away from the Korean educational and cultural system in which she

found injustice and competition, and traveling to her imagined "freer and better world". In other words, her desire to go to the West delocalized her experiences in Korea even before her actual geographical traveling to the Canada.

During Cross-Cultural Experience

In the Between Filial Piety and Self-Desire

In her final year of high school, when everyone was obsessed about university entrance exams, Minji declared to her mom and teachers: "I am not going to university in Korea". Her declaration came as a big surprise to many teachers in school. After all, she was a bright scholarship student in school, who was expected to make it to one of Korea's good universities. The response of teachers varied, she said:

> Some teachers were saying to me, 'What on earth are you going to do in a foreign country? Go to university in Korea. It is much tougher to go to foreign university'. Others were saying, 'Well, you think differently, don't you?'... As for my homeroom teacher, he was just watching over me. He didn't say one thing or the other.

Although such responses of teachers did not bother Minji much, that of her mother - who was a widow at this time- troubled her a lot.

> Mom had really tough time to accept my decision. She wept a lot. She must have thought 'I have brought you up to this very day, only to see you not going to university'. She even once visited my school. One afternoon I found my mom talking to my homeroom teacher with all tears. Ahh, my heart was broken at that time! I could sense intuitively what she was doing...she was pleading my teacher to persuade me to change my decision.

Seeing her mom like that inevitably made Minji guilty, but for the stubborn girl that she was there was no taking back her words. However, although she was firm

in her decision, Minji went through severe inner conflicts watching the agony of her mother. She recalled:

> My heart was really broken. Back then, I often gave a serious thought if I should give up my dream of going abroad for my mother. My mom was saying to me, 'if you go away, how can I live my life? I can live with you but not with your brothers'... Since young, my mom really cared for me, so it was really tough thing for me to leave my mom behind there. Yet, I was the person who should do what I wanted to do...Also because what I wanted was not the kind of taking any wrong road, ... Because I had a dream, the dream to achieve, I told my mom, 'please, be patient for a while. As soon as I graduate, I will do something for you'. Yes, I had a lot of conflicts. When I first came to Canada leaving my mom behind there, I thought myself as a bad girl. She has raised me to this day, was it really necessary for me to do this against my mom? Such sense of guilt really bothered me.

Minji's guilt might be something difficult to understand from the Western point of view that takes children's dependence for granted after their high school graduation. What makes Minji guilty is Korean children's strong sense of indebtness to their parents, what is so called *dori* of the children. According to the Confucian tradition, by virtue of one's birth and subsequent nurturing one is socially indebted to one's parents and has the *dori* to pay it back in the form of filial piety, being loyal to one's parents. And the biggest form of filial piety might be, as many Koreans would believe, to live with one's parents supporting them (both financially and physically) until their death. In Minji's case, she felt such obligation more greatly because of the close mother-daughter relationship nurtured from early on and her mother's widow-ness at the time. At the same time, the pursuit of autonomy and independence is part of growing up in today's Korea (Hyun, 2001). In Minji's case, her admiration of foreign life and frequent contact with foreign culture through media may have increased the sense of legitimacy in her principle of "I should do what I want to do". The thinking "I

should do what I wanted to do, no matter what" weighed against her wish to perform *dori* for her mother- a moral balance in fragile equilibrium.

Then right after high school graduation, Minji looked for a job and began to work while waiting for her mother's approval. In her mind, she wanted to share the financial burden her mother would take when she went abroad to study one day. More importantly, through her hard work, she wanted to prove to her mother how ready she was to leave her nest and stand on her feet. Soon, as a Korean saying goes, "there are no parents who win over their children," Minji's mother gave in. In February of 2002, Minji started to prepare her *uhak* with her mother's approval.

The First Sojourn: the Failing Fantasy and the Beginning of Identity Inquiry

While preparing her *uhak*, Minji decided to go to Toronto in Canada. The United States was her first choice, but the IMF era taking place in Korea at the time made the exchange rate of the American dollar too difficult for Minji's family to afford the expense. Also, the idea of 'whether it's States or Canada, there is no big difference' led her to opt for Canada, where it seemed less expensive to study than in the United States.

Thinking of her aspirations and optimistic outlook for life in the West, I expected that the story of her first sojourn would be filled with excitement and excellent adjustment stories. Her story was different, however. The imagination of "living with excitement while meeting many foreigners and speaking English everyday" turned out to be just a "fantasy" in the face of her reality.

First of all, there was the problem of her lack of English proficiency. Although she had dreamed of speaking English everyday for most of her life, she now found herself hardly able to make herself understood in English. She explained:

> In high school, I used to memorize many English expressions and use them when talking to my English teacher. But they were sort of textbook expressions... Here I noticed that real English was quite different. I was not even able to buy a cup of coffee at the shop and I was afraid of speaking English. I was always scared if they might look down on me because of my poor English.

Then, the fear of speaking English became so strong that she eventually skipped all ESL classes she enrolled in. As she stopped going to school, she became more of a loner than ever in her life in a totally foreign country. The loneliness and despair those days were so hard that Minji shuddered recalling the time:

> It was really tough time for me... I couldn't go to school because I could hardly understand the class. I became so depressed. I did not have any energy. As I lost my mind, I did not want to do anything. It was really tough! I would sleep a lot at home and wake up around noon. Then I hung around taking a subway with no purpose...living like that for a few months really drove me crazy. At that time, I really thought of a lot of depressed things... I really missed my family. I missed them so much. Studying in English seemed far above my head and no friends ... I did not know what to do. Once my will got weakened, then everything fell down at one time. I became a loser!

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) note that when individuals move from one native culture into another, they experience " the conversion of the subject, actively embedded in their world, into objects no longer able to fully animate that world. In other words, it is about the loss of agency in the world- an agency, in large part, constructed through linguistic means" (p.164). Minji's first sojourn story attests to this statement. Being unable to communicate in English, she soon lost her sense of agency, being a passive object of her foreign environment.

However, considering her long-seated admiration for foreign life and English, I puzzled over her poor adjustment story. She had the biggest admiration of foreign life of all the participants in this study, but shared the worst adjustment story. In fact, Minji recalled that she was the worst adjustment case in her Toronto school. However, reading her transcripts again and again, now I think I understand the reason better. Besides her lack of confidence in English, her sensitivity over the evaluation of others, which derived from her memories of friends in junior high school, must have played a role in her passiveness in learning English and social adjustment. She often mentioned that in those days she was too scared if people would laugh at or look down on her. This vulnerable sense of self-identity, entangled with her weak English, kept her from looking for any help or fellowship. When I asked whether or not she could locate any person who could help her at the time, she simply responded that she did not have many opportunities to meet people after dropping out of school, and that she would feel too intimated about speaking English. There was little sign in her story of initiating a contact or seeking help that she needed at the time.

Although having such a hard time, she was not able to change her mind and decide to go back home. She was well aware that she was solely responsible for choosing that road. Because it was her own decision, she could not allow herself to give up and go home easily. "The thought of going back home would hurt my self-pride too much" she recalled. The face of brothers and people who objected to her trip with their suspicious look would pass by in her head. Between the sense of responsibility and the sense of inability, Minji felt that she had no

place to turn to. Consequently the time of dislocation led her to an identity inquiry for the first time in her life. She said,

> I haven't really thought much about my identity until the time. I just brought my fantasy to Canada… Then the tough time of Toronto made me think a lot about 'Who on earth am I? Why am I here?'"… Yet I couldn't find any answer for that. That's why I eventually decided to go back home. Ahh, I was so helpless. Although I had taken myself to this far, it seemed impossible to find any right answer.

Thus, she came back to Korea in the summer of 2003. It had been a year and two months since she had left home. The thought that she had wasted valuable time and money made her feel shame and guilt before her mother and brothers. But, her mother did not blame her at all. She recalled:

> My mom welcomed me with a big smile. She told me that I could start again in Korea. She suggested me to prepare the university entrance exam for one year and to apply for universities in Korea. But I knew there were big worries behind her smile and suggestion.

Considering the tough time she had in Toronto, I expected that she decided to follow her mother's suggestion, went to cram school and got ready for the university entrance exam in Korea, leaving her admiration for a foreign life behind. To my surprise, however, she decided to come back to Canada after one month of her home return. This time it was her mother who suggested that she return to Canada. She recalled:

> One day, mom asked me if I did want to go back and study here. She told me, 'studying abroad was the thing you had desired so much for the most of your life, so you might not be happy with university life in Korea even if you could get into one. Think over it again and if you want to stay, stay but if you want to go back, then go back to Canada.'

Then Minji decided to come back to Canada, she said. Remembering her mother's objection to Minji's first sojourn, her mother's contrasting attitude and suggestion surprised me. Minji responded:

> I think my mom gathered much information about cram schools and the life of *Jaesusaeng*. Then one day, she told me, 'If you really want to continue your study, don't stay here and go back there to study. The life of *Jaesu* might not be no easier than studying abroad. Also English is essential nowadays…it's evident that you will need English when you look for a job in the future'.

For a combination of reasons, Minji's mother suggested her going back to Canada. My suspicion is that Minji's mother might also have concerned her daughter's possible failure in getting into a Korean university. Minji once said that she had hardly studied for the university entrance exam during her high school days. So the chance of successful results of *jaesu* must have seemed pretty unlikely to her mother. Besides, like Heejin's parents, she was well aware of the value and need of English knowledge for Minji's future career life. When Minji decided to follow her mother's suggestion, she had no time to lose. Her student visa was reaching its expiry date, so she came back to Canada after a month. This time, the city she headed for was Vancouver.

The Second Sojourn: Beginning of Better Adjustment

When Minji first came to Vancouver, she said that she no longer had a fear for *uhak* life because she thought there was no way back down again. With a grateful heart to her mother and a regretful mind about her first sojourn life in Toronto, she tried her best to get over her fear of speaking English. This time the thought that she could not make another failure captured her. Feeling too indebted to her mother to make another poor adjustment, she set herself a clear agenda: "I will finish university here and become a successful career woman. Then, I'll bring my mom to Canada and make her happy".

Such a resolution in her mind and the emotional support she gained from her mother seemed to make a big difference in Minji's second adjustment story. Most of all, she kept going to ESL classes and tried her best to improve her English. Then her improved English as well as her better cultural adjustment began to give her a sense of confidence, she said:

> In Toronto, I could not understand anything, and everything seemed so different. Yet here in Vancouver, I came to get used to things… culture and language…As I came to understand English and make communications with people better, I gained a great self-confidence. It (being able to make a communication) helped me understand things better, whatever I learned… I think communication was really important.

She attributed her improved English and communicative ability to the help of her Canadian boyfriend, whom she had met just after a few months of her arrival in Vancouver. To use her expression, her boyfriend- who is twenty years older than she- is like a 'teacher' to her:

> Maybe because he is old, he is not like young people who love fun. He is very disciplined, having his own 'dos' and 'don't'. When I am tired of school life, so when I want to sleep in, he would phone and check on me whether or not I am studying (laugh).

It is interesting to see how Minji came to go out with a Canadian boyfriend who is twenty years older than she. Although international dating is not an uncommon scene in the Vancouver setting, I suspect that, from most of Koreans' point of view, international dating or marriage, was un welcomed and criticized. The large age gap between Minji and her boyfriend was even less accepted. As a matter of fact, from my own experiences with many Korean international students, I often heard criticism against some *uhaksaengs* in international dating that they take advantage of the relationship just for the sake of English practice or fun, though this is not just a doubt but also a stereotype. Minji

was well aware of such criticism and Koreans' general prejudice towards international dating. Yet, her defense was clear and bold:

> In my case, I like foreigners more than Koreans. It is just like that in my eyes. People have their own tastes. When I see men, Korean men do not attract me. No matter how handsome they are… I did not even have one Korean boyfriend until I graduated from high school. I mean it (laugh)… because I like foreigners so much. In my eyes, only foreigners look like men, Koreans are just friends… I don't know why, but I think I liked them (foreigners) that much.

Regarding the age gap, Minji explained it as one of the merits that keeps their relationship: "As we have a big age difference, we try to understand each other harder. We don't talk about the things that each person does not like". However, their big age gap raised many concerns and worries from her family. She said:

> My mom was about to go crazy in the beginning. Yet as my boyfriend kept phoning her regularly, she began to trust us. I also visit my boyfriend's mom every Sunday, and she came to trust us as well. However, at my workplace (Japanese-Korean restaurant), people there initially told me that our relationship was wrong one. I was offended at first, and tried to prove that our relationship was not like what they assumed. Yet I don't try to earn their approval. Foreigners don't really care about the age gap. Yet, Koreans are different. For instance, one of my Korean friends advised me, 'tell others that you have only 10 years gap, not 20 years. Otherwise, they would consider you crazy (laugh).'

Listening to her, I have to admit that I felt neither positive nor convinced by her explanations. But as I am writing this, it now strikes me that such an international relationship might be a natural outcome of her long-held admiration for foreign life and her family/friends' background in Korea- It seems to me that Minji felt more comfortable with and trusting of people who are older because of the painful memories of her peer relationships. Also having lost her father at an early age, Minji might have felt more attracted to a man of her parents' generation, who could provide her with guidance over *uhak* life as well as a sense of family:

She used to tell me that her boyfriend had a great influence on her in that she became more disciplined (in terms of finances, diet, and academic life) and that she had someone whom she could turn to whenever she felt homesickness.

One year after her arrival in Vancouver, by the time I first met Minji, her *uhak* life in Vancouver turned out to be very different from her earlier sojourn in Toronto. Apparently, she seemed to have made a better adjustment to Vancouver life and gained some self-confidence in terms of her English and cultural comfort. As her mind settled, she didn't feel a need to associate with Korean people or have any other social life. She said that her busy daily routine made it difficult to have any social life with either Koreans or Canadians except with her boyfriend: As soon as she finishes her ESL classes at a college, she runs to a Korean-Japanese restaurant where she works part-time as a waitress. Then she spends the rest of the day either meeting her boyfriend or doing her school assignments. She sounded proud of herself in that she was making progress in her maturity (in comparison with her Toronto life). She also felt that she was working hard to make the most of her given opportunities. With the changes made in her Vancouver life, "I found myself fit into Canada culture better than Korean one. I feel more comfortable here", she said.

Emerging Identity in Conflict

Language, Cultural value, and Identity

The snippets of Vancouver adjustment stories I received from Minji during our first and second interviews suggested excellent adjustment stories. Yet, differences began to surface in the following interviews. As we built more trust

with each other, she came to share more detailed stories of the struggles and confusion behind her apparent smiles. Her improved English in combination with the apparent ease with which she went about the relationship with her boyfriend made her appear deceptively well- adjusted to Vancouver life, not only to others but even to herself. But the stress was taking an emotional toll on her to the extent that she poured her conflicts and struggles out to me one day.

The conflicts were first evident in her relationship with her boyfriend, who had a different language and cultural values. Besides TOEFL classes, the primary source of Minji's English learning was her Canadian boyfriend. In the beginning of their dating, Minji felt grateful for her boy friend's encouragement and company, she said. However, when her English improved sufficiently to make basic communications, she felt some barriers in their conversations: It had something to do with cultural difference in conversational style and family values. She explained:

> I got to realize that we have different conversation style. They (Canadians) speak their thoughts quite spontaneously, but we Koreans always think first whether this is right or wrong and then speak out. However, they just speak out. They speak out everything just naturally. I think that is my boyfriend's complaint about me. He often tells me 'why don't you speak out your thought?' Yet, I do think first and then speak out. Still my boyfriend asks me to speak without thinking much, so that we can make conversations. Then I tell him, 'I can't do it that way'. I think people here speak too many useless words. In my boyfriend's case, he talks all about what he did either to his mother or friends. I wonder why they have to talk that much. It seems a little inconsiderate in Korea. But here that's so normal.

The different cultural approach in making conversations made her become more silent in front of her boyfriend despite her enthusiasm to learn English, she said.

In addition to the different conversational styles in general, different family values in particular turned out to be another big hurdle in their conversations. Minji simply could not understand the individualistic values of the parent-child relationship of her Canadian boyfriend:

> We have very different thoughts related to our mothers. My boyfriend's mother, she is about seventy years old, but they don't live together. His mom says she prefer living alone. Seeing that.... I once asked him, 'she is pretty old, why don't you live with her?', but he says that he doesn't like it, either. He doesn't want to be controlled or controlling.

As a girl, who grew up within a Confucian, interdependent family culture in Korea, her boyfriends' display of autonomous family relationships was something hard to accept. That was particularly so because Minji had a strong wish that she would bring her mom to Canada someday to live with her. She continued:

> I can't understand it (her boyfriend's idea). If mom had her own job and successful life, it is okay for her to live alone. But our mother always lived for her children. When mother devotes herself to raising children, she loses her own career. When she gets older, how can she be rewarded? I believe children should reward her (by living with and supporting her). However, people here have different idea. It's parents' job to raise children. Then, your life is yours. They take it grant that parents raise you once they gave birth to you.

When I asked if she had discussed this issue with her boyfriend to get mutual understanding, she responded me that, "well, not much now." Although her boyfriend occasionally asks about her family, there is always a limit to his questions and responses. "I sense he has something in his mind", said she. It seemed to me that such topics had never reached mutual agreement or understanding; instead, they became sensitive issues that they both eventually avoided discussing.

Listening to all this and her plan of bringing her mother to Canada someday, I wondered about how her mother would think of coming to Canada: Has Minji ever thought of potential challenges involved in her mother's linguistic/ cultural adjustment to Canada at her late age? Will be she able to make so called a "better life" here as her daughter expected?" In fact, these questions were also on Minji's mind with no light struggle. She responded:

> Yes, I also worry about her adjustment. She might feel more comfortable with Korean life as she gets older. This country has different thinking style, and in my case, I have experienced terrible loneliness. I always worry whether my mother can get over it. I often ask myself if I am being too selfish in hoping to bring her to Canada and question if she can be really happy here. Ahh how can she not be lonely? I know that many immigrants here lead a hard life. I have witnessed it. So I once thought of going back to Korea myself to stay together with my mom, but I still like foreign countries. I don't know what to do about this. This is constantly in my mind

By expressing what felt strange and bizarre about her boyfriend's way of thinking regarding the family relationship and communication styles, Minji was revealing her own cultural identity, which was more Korean than Canadian. However, struggling in the space between her role as a Korean daughter and her wish to pursue her desire in a foreign country, she was also revealing a multi-cultural identity. Herman (2001) notes that when people are raised in one culture and then migrate to another, they arrive in a situation in which two or more heterogeneous internal positions interact with a multiplicity of external positions. Such positions may be felt as conflicting or they may coexist in relatively independent ways so that people experience uncertainty and ambiguities (p. 258). At the intersection of different positions and conflicting interests in herself, Minji often seemed to be at a loss.

Sense of Loss versus Sense of Gain

In terms of other aspects of social life, Minji was also juggling with different facets of self-desire in her. Although one of the main reasons she prefers a foreign country was its "space" and the "freedom of life", she also knew that it was at the cost of impoverished social contact. Herein she found that she was constantly weighing the sense of loss against a sense of gain.

Since she came to Canada, her social world had become severely limited to a small circle of people. By the time we had conducted the interviews for this study, I realized that her social world consisted only of her boyfriend, his mother, a few Koreans at her workplace, and me. When I asked if she ever tried to develop a greater social network with Canadians, other ethnics, or Koreans, she said "No". The reasons were two-fold: one was that she did not have any extra time for socializing and the other was that, even if there was time, there was no continuity in most social gatherings. She explained:

> Either Canadians or Koreans, I think it is really hard to meet good people. Because each one's life is busy... Here people become friends when they meet, but strangers when they apart. I also don't try to build any deeper relationships with Koreans at school. I avoid hanging around with them... because most of them are going back to Korea. It could break my heart. It maybe nice to meet new people, but you have to say good bye to them soon. It is not easy. As there is no long-lasting relationship, I try to keep my relationship with people just on the superficial level.

Minji's words echoes Heejin's story of a *uhaksaeng*'s social life: Discontinuity is a rule in *uhaksaeng's* relational life, especially, for *uhaksaeng* who stay abroad for a long time. While they have numerous chances to meet new people from diverse backgrounds (whether they intended ESL study for a short term or university program for a long term), most ESL students go back to their

country within a year or so, while most university students are busy with their academic workload. It seems that when continuity in our lives is threatened for one reason or another, our impulse is to try to protect or avoid it completely. In Minji's case, out of her fear for losing such continuity, she was avoiding making any meaningful relationships except with her boyfriend.

I found her impoverished social life understandable but sad. I could not help thinking that she was losing too much because of her fear. In my eyes, her little social connection with other English speaking people or Korean people seemed to cause her more loss than the loss of continuity that she feared. For instance, her English was getting stuck in her boyfriend's language: "I feel like my speech (in English) is just following the way my boyfriend does," she said. Hardly sharing deeper level of stories beyond daily life even with her boyfriend, she was afraid of trying out English expressions beyond that of an informal daily level. More importantly, from my concerned eyes, she was losing the valuable opportunities to nurture and grow up herself by refusing to be in what Taylor calls "webs of interlocution" (1989, p.34). Has she ever thought of such losses? - The loss of resonance, richness and depth of experience as a relational being? Her response was:

> I don't think that my mind is ready for that. If I like this person, I hope the person can stick with me. If he or she goes away, I feel like being betrayed. After all the time spent together, if he or she goes away, what should I do, I feel so much loss... Still it is not easy for me to send someone away. It is not easy. It is tough!

Now I see that such response of Minji was not only the source but also the result of her prolonged impoverished social contact. It seemed to me that her limited social life deterred the social development that corresponded to her

chronological age: Just like a child who can't bear the parting easily, she found it too hard, even feeling like "betrayed". Kanno (1996) points out that "the issue of arrested social development caused by impoverished social contact has not been much explored in the context of cross-cultural experience, but that the possibility is a real one for anyone living in a foreign country" (p.243). Whether she was aware of the interruption in her social development or not, it was clear that her impoverished social contact was taking a toll on her:

> I don't know. Although I met a lot of people here, most of the meetings have not been influential to me. They were just rhetorical and superficial. However, I agree that it is really important to meet good people in one's life. Do you know the changes happened to me since I came here? I became too cold in an emotional aspect. In Korea, people exchange "Jung" and share lives. When we become sick, we care for and help each other. But here, you have to deal with your own survival. Experiencing it, I cried a lot and felt so lonely.. Although I have my dream and feel hopeful thinking of my future, I found myself become cold and selfish, to be honest. It sometimes makes me feel guilty. In Korea, maybe because of my admiration for foreign life, I believed that life here might have more space, but it may not be true. While I may become stronger, I become colder. No emotional space in my mind.

Lonely and guilty about the changes she felt, Minji was still thinking it was the price she had to pay for the freedom endowed in a foreign life. To her, the gain of freedom seemed to weigh more than the loss of belonging:

> I think I prefer this freedom…although I am lonely. I feel more comfortable here. In Korea, people talk and concern my life as they know my family, my upbringings. If I do something wrong, it could be harmful to my parents. I think that is kind of interruption to our lives. Koreans talk too much about others and we have to think of it seriously. Foreign people are not like that. They just listen, and still it's your business.

Spiritual Life: the Fear for Change

In one of our interviews, remembering the weight of spiritual life on other participants' *uhak* lives, I once inquired about Minji's religious experience. She

said that she was from a Buddhist family, but when she came to Toronto, she visited the church once in a while when her life was under big stress. She recalled her experiences with church in Toronto with mixed feelings:

> My days in Toronto was really tough, remember? Maybe, because of that, I always felt some comfort at the church and I would cry a lot there. I do not know why. But I cried a lot there whenever I heard some gospel songs. That made me think 'Maybe someone is up there and comforting me'... Then, one summer, I decided to join KOSTA conference. I wanted to meet God. I wondered if God would accept me or not. So I joined KOSTA and prayed hard there... but God did not meet me. One friend who went there with me met God. So I wondered why God did not accept me.

When I asked her what she meant by "God did not accept me", she responded that if God had accepted her, she believed she could have been given a visual sign of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues in her prayers. Since then, religion has just remained as a mystery to her, and religious activities or communities have slipped out of her mind. Then, when she moved to Vancouver, as her life got more settled, she did not feel a need to engage in any religious communities, she said. However, the real reason she confessed at later conversation was different. The confession was revealing:

> If I get to have some kind of faith, I am afraid if I might depend on it. If God be there for me when I pray, when my life is tough, I might be more weakened...well, I am afraid...as I am now so weary... if I lean over Him, I might fall down.. That's in my mind now.

In Minji's mind accepting religious faith meant some kind of admission of weakness, which she felt too afraid to face. "I am afraid if I will become more weakened and smaller" she said, revealing that her Vancouver life after all has not been as easy for her as she had made it appear in our first couple of interviews.

Although she wanted to manage her "strength" with a shield of atheism, I also sensed some kind of inner conflicts when she asked me an unexpected

question in the middle of a conversation: "If I come to have any religious faith, do you think it will change me? Myself?" When I asked her back if she *wants* the change, she paused. Then she said, "No, I do not want to be changed because I have a lot of things to do. If I become changed, my aims here might be changed… because if I become change, my thoughts would be changed, right?"

Although she denied it, through her pause and facial look, I could not help thinking that she was badly longing for some change in herself. Out of the alienation and tiredness of her *uhak* life, she felt a need for some inner change, but the fragile self was too afraid to admit the need. Then when I asked her what aims she had and what things she needed to do, the very reasons for denial, she responded, "Finishing school and landing a good job here, and then making my mother happy…That is my goal."

Making an academic/career success in order to make her mother happy, and living a life free from what others say are major themes that run deep in Minji's *uhak* story. Although I appreciated her strong sense of *dori* as a daughter towards her mother, I could not help thinking that her alienated life and her sense of daughter obligation were too much of a burden for a girl in her early twenties. I remembered what she once shared with me in an informal meeting:

> I often tell my boyfriend that I am a super-girl. Well, I need to control my sleeping time, I should lessen my sleeping hour and study more, but it is hard. I heard that *uhaksaengs* should sleep only three to four hours. Otherwise it is hard to be successful… Once in a while, I cry because of this tension that I should work and live hard. To be honest, I cry once a week, every week. Every Monday morning, I cannot help my tears. Then I feel better after crying. (laugh)… The questions such as 'why I am here?'; 'Why do I have to live like this?' trouble me...Nonetheless, I like here...I feel better after such crying. It is really hard to go back to my routine every Monday morning, yet I am getting used to it. However if I break the

> cycle, I become different... sad and think a lot. So I try to keep myself busy in order to avoid such thoughts.

It seemed clear to me that Minji's mental stress as attested by the above statement has also been affecting her physical wellness: she had lost over fifteen kilograms since she came to Vancouver, she said.

Un-forgiven Past

According to Kanno (1996), because of the affirming nature of the narrative mode of knowing, researchers are at times drawn into the role of confidant for their participants, whether they intend it or not. When this happens, Kanno notes that "the boundary between what is and what is not for research and between researcher and friend becomes blurred" (p.263). As I had more interviews with Minji, I began to experience this research/ not-research boundary. It seemed that Minji often turned to the interviews as a site in which she could pour out her heart, and I felt a need to listen and to be there for her as a friend rather than a researcher.

Then, probably because she thought that enough friendship was established between us, Minji, one day, began to share more stories about her father, whom she had not much talked about before. While sharing her future plans for her and her mother, she explained what a tough life her mother had lived, especially since her father's death:

> When my father died around the time of IMF era - when I was in junior high school, my mom really went through a hard time. He was the only goal of her life, but he suddenly passed away. At the time, because of immanent IMF influence, my father's business was at risk, and father and mom had a tough time... It was really tough for her to get over my father's death.

When I told her it must have been tough for Minji as well, she could not control her tears, saying, "Everything seemed to collapse at the time. (silence).. I could not even cry when I found him dead. I was dumbfounded. I was so devastated." Then when I asked if it was an accidental death, she said:

> No,...he killed himself... I hated him... I hated him really...Maybe things were too tough for him at the time...But I still cannot understand...Maybe it is how things go- sons are on dad's side and daughters are mom's side. My brothers seemed to get over his death soon and they seemed to have no enough concern for mom. They got okay a few years after his death. But mom and I were in constant pain... Also I was too ashamed the fact I have no father (weeping)... I still cannot forgive my father...no, I can't...So I wanted to do well to my mother (weeping).

I remember my frustration about not knowing how to share her distress and pain at the time. I wanted to console her, but I felt that my understanding of her pain was too limited, so I did nothing but just listen to her with my hands on her shoulders. As I listened to her father's story and her pain over an un-forgiven past, I could understand the major themes of her *uhak* life to another level of depth: Her resentment towards Korean women's life, her need for a life free from others' talk, her sense of obligation that "I need to make mom happy through my success" began to make more sense to me. The painful memories, entangled with her early fantasy for Western life, tailored not only her path to Canada but also the personal and social terrains of her everyday *uhak* life.

Future Anticipation

Emerging New Perspective

By the time we had our last couple of conversations, Minji was applying for a regular program at university. Since she was young, Minji had dreamed of

becoming a flight attendant, which could give her opportunities to travel around foreign countries. Yet, going to the flight attendant training program in Canada seemed impossible because it required her to have a certain level of French proficiency. Thus, she was resorting to another major, hospitality program, which she believed was one of the most promising job fields in Vancouver. When I once asked her how she pictured herself in the future, she described herself as being a successful career woman who possessed her own big house and her favorite car- which is an American "Herman". Then she added "thinking of my future, I am very happy…Ahh (laugh)…I wish I could meet this future soon", revealing that her present life is rather distant from that sense of "happiness". In fact, for the most of the time that I have known Minji, the future she was dreaming of seemed to be the only thing that sustained her present *uhak* life. Her lonely and hard reality was justified and considered meaningful only by its reference to her future success, which she believed would make her life happier and brighter.

However, in our last interview, I sensed that she had begun to question the meaning of her *uhak* life from a new perspective. She told me:

> Nowadays I am wondering with what thoughts how others live. Since I came to have conversations with you, I have come to think of a question such as "what is life?"…This is a wonder to me. Once I had believed… If I could live like now, if I live in a foreign country, something good would happen to me. I believed there must be a life that I had dreamed of… but I realized that… everything turns out sort of same.. .when you come to the dreamed life, there still exists some difficulty and boredom... Nowadays such thoughts occur to me quite often.

I was not really expecting such movement in her thought. But it seemed clear to me that her reflections on the past and present *uhak* life in our interviews have led her to some sort of awakening. This was also attested to in a question she

posed following the above statement: "I am really curious to know…I believe you have met many Korean *uhaksaengs* so far, through your schools and through your church. If you can find one commonality among them, what do you think it is?" Then when I asked her if she could first share what commonality she had found among Korean *uhaksaengs*, she responded:

> When I see Korean *uhaksaengs*, I can notice two types of people: One is those who came here running away from the reality of Korean society. The other is those people who came here dreaming of a success in their lives. I think most Korean *uhaksaengs* are one of these two types… And, so far I have seen many people who came here to pursuit their success, but who went through a tough time. Their lives are so insecure that they began to rethink, 'this is not what I dreamed'. They had a desire to achieve something, yet they found things going unlike they intended. ..Yes, I have seen such people many times…So far.

Even though she was using the third person pronoun in her response, I could not help thinking she was describing her own story: She was bent on her dream of a foreign life /career success for a long time. However, she came to feel that she, in fact, might have never fully encompassed what she was projecting for herself. This seemed evident in her following confessions:

> Nowadays I am thinking 'was I too naïve?'… my loneliness…Before I know it, it becomes bigger. Really, what is the purpose of my *uhak* life? It did not even help me to meet good people … I do not know, but I sense my loneliness became bigger in my heart.. always.. Even though I consider myself happy here…still there is a sense of lack and unhappiness. When I think of it, when I came to achieve one step of what I had dreamed of, I felt some emptiness. Before I came to study abroad, I just had a fantasy for *uhak*. The reality of *uhak* had never occurred to me.. but here I knew it better.. When I think of future, I feel happy. I know, however, when I get there, there must be some sense of hunger and wanting more… But, I guess I do not want to think of those now.

As Taylor (1989) notes, we come to know what we are by what we have become, by the story of how we got there. Through her reflection on her past and present life, Minji seemed to realize how much illusion or dreaming was involved

in her life world. In fact, the theme running through her *uhak* story has been "dreaming", with her years in Korea spent on "dreaming of better foreign country" and the last few years on "dreaming of better future". But now seeing how she has fit into her surrounding life, she was beginning to question how genuinely her dreams have reflected real wellness and fulfillment in her reality. Wrapping up our last conversation, I remember wondering myself: Will she be able to question on and let go of her long seated illusion or dream? Will she be able to step over the pain of her past and learn to live her "now"? This may be a hard challenge for someone who has always sought her ideal self and life from somewhere else into the future. Yet, my wish is that she will be able to take up the challenge and someday tell me that she is discovering many facets of her dreamed life and ideal self not only "over there" but also in her "here and now". I also hope that, when she tells me that, I can respond to her with no hesitation, "Yes, I am taking up the challenge in my everyday life, too."

PART THREE

SYNTHESIS: INTERPRETATION

Chapter 8, In Search of a Better Self and Future

I have shared each participant's stories. Now it is time for a synthesis. Although each individual's experience was unique, there are some common threads running through their stories, which could provide us with some collective insights and understandings of this research inquiry. In this section, I try to seek more holistic and comprehensible interpretations of the above narratives by pulling out their common themes and discussing issues surrounding each theme. The point is to link the specific to the general.

Identity Formation/Background in Korea

When I listened to and reflected on each participant's stories and experiences in Korea, it was not difficult to notice that each participant's motivation for coming to Canada shared two common beliefs or anticipations: One was that all participants believed that studying English or studying abroad would provide them with better opportunities for academic or career success in Korea, which was the key basis of their perceptions or understandings of self-identity. The other was that they all had a certain imagined enchantment towards the West, which reveals hegemonic power of Western/English culture prevalent in Korean society.

As shown in the narratives, for Hyun, studying abroad/English meant seeking a better opportunity to land a job at a major company. Samgi believed that studying abroad would help him gain better access to his career success as a cook. For Heejin and Minji, studying abroad meant an investment in their academic

training, which aimed at their career successes in the future. To all of my participants, academic or career success was an important measure of perceiving their self-identity. Because of the value they put on this academic and career success, each Hyun and Heejin suffered a deficient identity when they were out of work or not in school in Korea. Samgi and Minji, holding to a strong belief in their career success in the North America, they anticipated that it could make them become more than what they would find themselves to be in Korea. From this perspective, each participant's motivation of studying abroad/ English learning could be seen as their efforts to seek "a better self and future", as Heejin expressed in one interview. This was evidently imbued with their admiration for the West, which was nurtured through the media or parents in their upbringings.

The common themes emerging from the stories of why each participant came to Canada witness the importance of understanding language and identity issues in relation to their historical, cultural and social context, as discussed in the theoretical framework for this study (see chapter 2). In this regard, it seems to me that the understanding of the participants' motivations for studying abroad/ English learning needs to begin with an understanding of Korean educational culture and its affects on identity of Korean learners. Then, the role of English in Korean society and the issue of cultural inequality in relation to identity of Korean learners needs to be discussed within a critical understanding of the social, cultural, and ideological context in which English gained its power in Korea.

Academic/Career Success as the Key Measure of Identity

My participants' stories in Korea reveal a great amount of weight given to their academic/ career success as the basis and measure of their self-identity. They identified themselves most in their educational/career experiences. They associated their self-worth mostly with academic/ career accomplishment, and this seemed to be the most significant reason for their border-crossings: Hyun considered himself as "*monnani*" due to his unsatisfying educational achievement. His travel to Canada was an effort to overcome his "*monnani*" identity through the attainment of a good job after having had the experience of studying abroad. Samgi dreamed of going abroad for the pursuit of his career success as a cook, which was an important standard by which to measure his self-worth in Korean life. As for Heejin, she suffered an identity crisis when she failed to enter the university, turning from "*mobumsaeng*" to "*jaesusaeng*". Along with a strong imagined enchantment of a foreign life, the ambition of academic/career success was the major motivation of Minji's movement to Canada.

It may sound quite natural that education and career achievements carry a significant meaning in our life and self-understanding, but what I found problematic from the narratives of my participants was that their sense of self-worth was so dependent on their academic/career "success" or "achievement", that without it they suffered a great deal of identity loss (e.g., Heejin's case) or an inferior identity (e.g., Hyun and Samgi), or that which became the only goal in life (e.g., Minji's case).

In fact, this issue of academic/ career success is closely linked to the strong zeal for elite education in Korean society. As the hyphen indicates, academic

success or achievement is viewed as the key means to access to social and economic success in Korea. To be more specific, it is a widespread popular belief that a degree from a prestigious university sets one on the track of upward mobility through the status, class and economic structure (Lee and Brinton, 1996). My participants' stories reflect this fact: Hyun's father and Heejin's parents' wishes to send their children to a prestigious university were for the sake of their children's social success; Samgi could not see the prospect of career success in Korea with his college diploma. The close link between graduation from elite universities and socioeconomic success has consolidated many Koreans' belief in the value of elite education, creating a so called "*hakbol*" (educational credentials)-oriented culture.

Of course, it is not a recent story that Koreans put high values on education. Because of its Confucian tradition, education has been highly valued in Korean society throughout its history. Yet, in the Confucian tradition, the primary aim of education was more about the cultivation of the whole person/ humanity. However, through the modernization process of the Korean education system, which was accompanied by an economic development project based on the financial market system of the West, the education system and culture have become all technical, putting educational "achievements" prior to personal "cultivations". In today's Korea, under the banner of globalization, the experience of studying abroad/English became one of crucial educational achievements or credentials required for one's socio-economic success, (to be more discussed more in the next section).

While individuals' achievement or success might be one of the important purposes of education, its increasing dominance in Korean education and resulting elite-oriented or credential-oriented educational culture seems to be creating unexpected problems, as revealed in the narratives of my participants. One such problem is that, as the four stories reveal, the elite-oriented Korean education culture produces more "educational victims", to borrow Heejin's word, than winners- because the word "elite", by its definition must be for a very few: Heejin's feelings of her becoming a "victim" of Korean educational culture; Hyun's long-seated "*monnani*" identity; and Samgi's sense of inferiority in terms of his career identity in a Korea society, all of those experiences represent this phenomena.

Another problem that leaks from the narratives of participants is their sense of pressure and competition with others and the anxiety about their self-identity: The sense of competition, the desire to run ahead of others on the conventional life path was an important issue in both Hyun and Samgi's stories in Korea; Heejin's constant comparison of herself with her friends was a main cause of her identity struggle in Korea. In Minji's case, the competition among friends' group left her bitter memories, which eventually made her desert any meaningful social relationship for a long time. As Paik (2005) notes in her study on Korean English education policy, the increasing "anxiety" and "competition" among students in Korea has brought about what is called "educational individualism" in the Korean educational sector (p.212). The discourse of competition and individualism justifies the value of "education for me" in the mind of many Korean parents and

students, while leading them to pursue more educational training to ensure their future success.

Therefore, it might be a natural outcome that studying abroad/ English is rapidly increasing among Korean learners who want to survive in their excessively competitive educational/social environment. However, the dismal realities of elite or *hakbol*-oriented educational culture are not enough to understand the actual growth of studying abroad/ English practices. While the competitive educational culture definitively prompts "English fever" in Korean society, a comprehensive picture of studying abroad/English phenomenon necessitates an understanding of the role of English in current Korean society and in the broader contexts of culture and ideology throughout the history of globalization/imperialism. This is discussed in the following section.

Studying Abroad/ English as the Medium of Academic/ Career Success

The stories of why each participant came to Canada provide us with a glimpse of the power that English has gained in current Korean society. Studying abroad/ English is never just an educational process, but also it is a cultural and social process that has significant meaning in the participants' identities in terms of social mobility and elitist training. According to Roh (2001), in current Korean society, English as international language is considered to be a standard to measure Korean students' aptitudes, competencies and futures. It is also the basis for application and selection of universities to attend and employment possibilities, as attested to in the above narratives. Kachru (1987) once notes that a language does not create power for itself, but there are agents which create and promote the

power of the language. Then, to understand the current status of English and its power over Korea, it is important to identify what is the agent that creates and promotes the power of English.

As some studies on the role of English in Korean society point out (Huh, 2004; Kim, 2002; Paik, 2005; Rhee, 2002; Roh, 2001), the power that English takes up in current Korean society has been shaped as a product of "globalization", which has been carried out in the 1990s under the banner of the *Segyehwa* (globalization) campaign. The government-driven campaign utilized the globalization discourse as a rationale for the active integration of the nation into the global economy and politics to further the socio-economic development of Korea. In this process, English language ability was perceived as crucial to "cope with increasing international communication with other countries…with a view to enhancing Korea's rapid economic growth and internationalization" (the Ministry of Education, 1997, p.3). Under such social circumstances, the power of English has been justified and accelerated as a vital key to social and economic development.

Although the power that English has in a society is taken for granted by most Korean teachers and students of English, including the participants in this study, the fact that the spread and power of English under the name of globalization is connected to an extension of the U.S. imperialism was not really well known to them. However, if we take a close look at the hegemonic power relationships involved in globalization institutions such as OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and World Bank, and their influence on the economy and educational policies throughout the world, we can

realize that English has been used, as Phillipson (1992) claims, as an essential medium to foster the spread of cultural knowledge, beliefs and values of the U.S to other countries. Such clear evidence is well manifested in the influence of the "human capital resource" model of education, which was disseminated to developing countries by the OECD and the World Bank. The human capital theory, which considers an individual's worth based on the knowledge and skills that can contribute to a growth in the economy, has made an huge impact on educational systems, resulting in market oriented education and "English fever" in non-English speaking countries. In fact, Korea, which has been under the influence of World Bank's policies and doctrines for the past three decades, became a model site for realizing this human capital theory (Huh, 2004). Considering that the World Bank was initially founded partly for creating markets for U.S goods and dominated by Euro-Americans, the influence of the human capital theory on Korean education and current "English fever" in Korea society directly reflects the transmission of the Euro-American educational and economic ideologies to Korean society.

However, the fact that English became the medium of an ideological and political agenda under the banner of globalization is hardly recognized by English learners. Rather, as Phillipson (1992, 2001) points out, the current status of English is rationalized and justified by non-native English speaking countries as a medium of international communication and as a gateway to social and economic development. Yet, as Kim (2002) note,

> The notion of English as a medium for the full access to economic and educational development is not only a myth but also represents false consciousness. False consciousness is in the way that it attempts to

> demean the nature of language by situating it exclusively in the context of linguistic/ communicative matter rather than understanding its political, economic, and cultural implications (p.27-28).

While English is viewed as a neutral medium of international communication and its spread is considered to be natural and inevitable, it is noteworthy that we are still confined to the dominant paradigm of English discourse, which lacks a critical understanding of English in its broader range of social, historical, cultural, and political relationships as criticized by many language educators. (e.g., Pennycook, 1994, 1999; Phillipson, 1992, 2001).

The dominant English discourse, its limited view on language and the resulting trend of "English for social mobility" has naturally led to some negative consequences in a Korean society. One of these consequences is that the English learning and knowledge has become more instrumental and technical and now fosters the virtue of self-interest and wealth accumulation in many minds of Korean youth, deserting any value of "self-cultivation" or "humane sensitivity". Clear evidence of such trends in Korean English education is the fact that, as Roh (2001) points out, "English is not regarded as ability in critical thinking, aesthetic education or any cross-cultural understanding of the target country in Korea" (p.110). My participants' stories prove the statement. Hyun, Samgi, Heejin, and Minji, all stated that their main purpose for studying abroad/English was focused on their academic or career success and their understandings of Canada and its culture before their sojourn were far from comprehensive ones.

As the increasing value given to English in Korean society enhances demands and stress on English knowledge, it has also brought about an immense amount of insecurity and anxiety among English learners about their unknown

future. This has, in turn, prompted the practice of studying abroad/English among many Korean learners who want to ensure their future success or "a better tomorrow", just as in the cases of the participants in this study. In fact, as some researchers on English in Korea notes, (e.g., Kim, 2002, Paik, 2005), in current Korea, studying abroad, especially short-term English study or *jogiuhak* (early study abroad) in an English speaking country is pursued more often by non-educational factors (such as an anxiety and insecurity about future success or the popularity of the *uhaksaeng* returnee), rather than by educational speculations (such as the effectiveness of studying abroad for individuals). Based on non-educational factors, many students pursue studying abroad/English but, too often without a clear direction, not knowing what and why they should study in English. Heejin's comment touched on this point when I once asked her whether or not she would try her *uhak* if she could go back to five years ago. Without hesitation, she responded:

> No. (laugh). Even if I wanted *uhak*, maybe I shouldn't have come to Canada without knowing what I really want to study. Because, in my case, I wasted too much time, and gone through too much confusions till I find it. If I had come here with a clear purpose and direction of my study, I could have detoured less and saved much of confusions.

Her response reveals how the experience of studying abroad for non-educationally driven reasons has reproduced an insecure identity during her actual *uhak* life and eventually regrets with respect to the experience itself. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Cultural Hegemony: Better "West"

Along with the theme of "English for social mobility", my participants' primary explanations of why they came to Canada mostly entail their "imagined enchantments of foreign/Western life". Their desire for academic/career success through English/ studying abroad was coincided with the fantasies and excitement they nurtured in relation to a new/foreign culture. In understanding Korean *uhaksaengs'* identity and cross-cultural experiences, it is important to understand the sources of this "admiration of the West", and how they influence the socialization and identity formation of Korean learners.

The narratives of my participants' stories show that one of the crucial agents of "admiration of West" is their parents. For Hyun, his choice to study/live abroad was tailored, nurtured, and encouraged by his parents. His admiration of Canada and the sense of appreciation for his Canadian citizenship had been cultivated by his parents' nostalgically narrated experiences of their time in Canada. For Heejin, the *uhak* to Canada was suggested and encouraged by her mother, who had a firm belief that Canada would provide the better educational system for Heejin. Samgi and Minji's parents might not have directly acknowledged their admiration of the West. But when I asked them how their parents would respond to their desires for studying/living in the West in the early years, they both said that their parents showed either their deep curiosity or mystical feelings towards foreign countries.

The source of their parents' admirations for the West is deeply related in the historical relationship between Korea and the U.S. As a post-war generation, these parents went through the U.S military government, Westernizing

educational development, and U.S capitalistic democracy, which produced an American image of Utopia in their minds (Son, 1990). Especially, through those who had access to a Western life style with either their migration (e.g., Hyun's father) or their military service (e.g., my father), their cultivated American styles, English ability and credentials along with Korean elite class status conferred legitimacy and a high status of Western culture in both public and private spheres in Korea. Through these experiences of our parents, the West has secured its place in the plans and dreams of our generation - just as in the cases of myself and the participants in this study. Writing this, I realize how heavily my fathers' wonderful image of America and his love for English knowledge, which definitely earned him much recognition and envy of people around him, had influenced my desire to come to North America.

The image of the "Better West" was planted through the American military government, and still remains as a cultural and linguistic imperialism through its recent commitment to globalization. Currently, our parents' awe for the West and my generation's succeeding admiration of the West has been further elevated by the power that English takes up in today's Korea. As mentioned above, in the face of globalization trend, the role of English as a gatekeeper to the position of power and prestige has certainly elevated Korean learners' admiration for Western knowledge and culture as they associate English with its culture. Hyun once told me that his admiration for Canada is partly due to the prestige and recognition granted to the people who earned their degrees in the North America. Heejin also addressed the "strange sense of reverence" that most Korean students have towards those who are studying or have completed their degrees in the North

America. The benefits of a North American degree/English ability, that is, better job opportunities, social respect and economic return continue to feed the superior status of the West in Korea.

This image of the "Better West" in the current period seems to have been more promoted by the role of the media. All of participants told me that the media was one of the primary channels via which they came to have a certain admiration for the West. The critical point is that the cultural message delivered through various the U.S./ Western media products, television, movies, and magazines has mislead them to fantasize about U.S/ Western culture as revealed in Minji's and Samgi's stories. Kim's study (2002) on English and its relationship to the socialization of Korean youth confirms this tendency. She points out that media's influence is so strong in transmitting American culture to the minds of Korean students that students tend to idealize American culture and show a great deal of admiration towards it, even though they are skeptical of the extent to which the media portrays the reality of American people and its culture. More importantly, the cultural message of the U.S. as the powerful nation of power and prosperity is perceived as "better" by most Korean students, which puts American culture in a superior position to Korean culture.

I believe it is significant to be aware of this cultural inequality embedded in Korean minds because it is making profound influences on the socialization and identity construction of Korean students. One such influence witnessed in the narratives of the participants in this study is the phenomenon of "delocalization". As shown in Minji, and Samgi's narratives, their enchantment of foreign life and the dream of traveling to a new and better world had taken a great part of their

localized lived experiences in Korea. Samgi's admiration of foreign life, and identifying himself with its culture delocalized his educational experiences in college. Minji just got by her high school days by cultivating the dream of running away from the Korean culture to traveling to her imagined "Better West". They both believed that they could make better selves in a far away land, and not in their immediate and local life-world. Thus, it might be no wonder that these two participants experienced most difficulty in terms of their social life as their delocalization process has made them more cynical about the interdependence in relations in the Korean life-world. Interestingly, their narratives reproduce the U.S/ Western imperialistic basis of "the American/foreign country dream".

Identity De/Re/ Construction in Canada

English and Identity Struggles

Unless international students from other countries arrive in North America already equipped with fairly advanced English proficiency, the first task they must face is to learn and improve their English ability. All of my participants, either as non-English majors (Hyun and Samgi) or graduates of high school (Minji and Heejin), they encountered this difficult task when they came to Canada. For all of them, studying (in) English was a formidable challenge, inextricably intertwined with their identity struggles in Canada.

When I reflected on the four participants' experiences related to English, there was one commonality in the entry and beginning of their Vancouver life. Although all of them had a strong enthusiasm for English learning, the expectation and understanding of their English learning journey they brought with

them from Korea far from the reality they faced upon arrival. In other words, they all had naïve optimism regarding their English learning process or learning context: Hyun thought that a years' English training would be sufficient for university admission. Samgi thought he could move on to a cooking college right after a few months of ESL training. Minji believed that she would quickly develop fluency by speaking English everyday in Canada, and Heejin expected that a one year ESL program would equip her with the academic English ability she required. As a result of their unrealistic beliefs and beginning expectations about learning English and its culture, the participants in this study developed a sense of despair and insecurity over their studies and/or to their poor cultural adjustment: If Hyun had set up more realistic goals in terms of his TOEFL attainment based on his English ability, I believe it could have saved him from a lot of anxiety and insecurity during his university preparation period. In Heejin's case, as she said, the lack of understanding of Canadian academic culture and her overlooking the significance of academic English skills in that culture led her to suffer severe stresses and poor adjustment to her first university. Samgi's simple credit over only a few months' ESL study prolonged his admission to a cooking college prolonged and later contributed to his experiences of "language shock" in his college years. Minji's naïve or even fantasized perception of English and its culture resulted in her poor adjustment in Toronto.

It seems to me that their naïve expectations about English/ academic studies, in other words, their lack of knowledge about the English learning process and academic culture is a consequence of the trend of "English for social mobility" and "Better West" in Korea, as mentioned above. That is, in the context

of linguistic-oriented instruction, stemming from "English as a means of academic/career success" perspective, any background and consideration in regard to target cultural sensitivity is being, often neglected in Korea (Roh, 2001). Minji's frustration over the gap between her English knowledge and real English usage, and her experience of "culture shock" reflect this fact. Along with cultural insensitivity, the lack of parallels between Korean and English language and cultures has led these participants to have an infatuated trust for English speaking countries: "Everything would work out if I go abroad", as Samgi once said. Writing this, it seems interesting to me that this kind of credit in English speaking countries originates from the general belief in Korea that someone who lives in a language and culture should acquire native-like proficiency and performance in English. The native speaker's criteria, standards and perspectives dominate in Korea as many scholars have pointed out (Kim, 2002; Roh, 2001). Thus, it is an appalling irony that all of the participants in this study reported that they experienced a lack of interaction with English native speakers during their *uhak* life. In a globalized world where people of various cultures and languages migrate and cohabit, English speaking countries may not necessarily have an English speaking context. (e.g.,Vancouver context). Also, academic trainings in these countries may not necessarily guarantee confident English speaking proficiency as indicated in Heejin's story.

In fact, the influence of cultural/linguistic inequality is not limited to my participants' unrealistic goals and expectations at the early stages of their *uhak* lives. Another significant educational impact of the cultural hegemony was seen in the participants' sense of inferiority towards the English native speakers during

their *uhak* lives. While conversing with the participants about their English-related experiences, I noted that all of my participants expressed a sense of "English native speaker superiority", which was an important source of deficient identity in terms of their English learning journey: Hyun's sense of inferiority towards his Canadian classmates, Samgi's taking for granted his position to be directed by Canadian peers, Heejin's acceptance of her peripheral place, and Minji's feeling intimidated in front of the native speakers all reflect this point. International students learn and speak English as a second language. They already speak at least one other language. However, when my participants talk about English, they never referred to the additive aspect of their bilingualism. Rather, they pointed to their lack of English proficiency. In others words, they defined themselves in terms of deficiencies rather than in terms of strengths. Even though all of my participants acknowledged that the perspective may not be appropriate, they expressed that it was hard to resist it. As Heejin put it, "it is there in our unconsciousness". However, what Rhee (2002) notes offers us much to think about: "the continuous and relentless stigmatization on foreign students' "English proficiency" as "the problem of foreign students" is naturalizing the monolithism of U.S. Anglo-English hegemony when much of the world are more than bilingual" (p.13).

The participants' identity struggles in terms of English were affected not only by the common aspect of cultural/ linguistic hegemony in their minds, but also by their respective self-understandings at that particular time, which was heavily influenced by their personal relationships and educational experiences. For instance, Hyun's venerable sense of self-esteem, evolved from his personal

relationship with his father as well as his educational experience in Korea, affected his passive interaction in class during the first couple of academic courses. It was when Hyun made a reconciliation with his father and reach a certain level of educational progress that he was able to overcome his deficient identity to a certain degree in terms of English/ academic studies. In the case of Minji, her fear of the relationship especially with peer groups, derived from her painful memories of friends in high school, certainly affected her poor adjustment to the new culture and English learning in Toronto. Norton and Toohey (2001) points out that much research on language learning has traditionally viewed language learning as individual minds acquiring linguistic, or even sociolinguistic, competence. The narratives of these participants' English journey, however, points out the need to see language learners as "members of social and historical collectivities" (p.119), rather than only as individual language producers. Such a perspective would never overlook each individual learner's unique life experiences, self-understanding, and the role of sociality in learning and using language.

Loneliness: Desire for Belonging

It strikes me now that when my participants spoke of their *uhak* lives, it was more about their social struggle rather than their academic challenges. Although all of my participants went through tough times in dealing with their academic work due to their disadvantage in English, most of them eventually handled it fine. Armed with a solid educational agenda and hard-working spirit, they were able to cope with their academic work with less difficulty as time went by. Yet, their struggle was constant in the realm of social life. More specifically,

their sense of loneliness and the desire for intercultural and interpersonal belonging turned out to be very important issues of my participants' *uhak* lives, as the following words from Heejin indicate:

> As for me, social life has been tougher than academic one. That means my relationship to people… my relationship to foreigners…Studying itself may not have been really hard…because of the hardship involved in social life… Maybe I would have done better with my studies if my families were here with me.

When I delve into my participants' social lives, I notice that my three participants except Minji initially sought their memberships into both an English community and Korean community. It seems that Hyun managed a kind of balanced relationship to both English and Korean communities while Samgi and Heejin's social world was more confined to the Korean community. However, these three participants in general had also acquired more Korean or other Asian friends than Caucasian Canadian ones. Although they all desired friendships with white Canadians, whom they consider to be typical English native speakers, they all shared difficulties with making steadfast or deep friendships with them.

The reasons for the limited friendships to host nationals vary depending on each participant. For Samgi, it was clear that his limited English ability was the biggest barrier. Yet, in Huyn's and Heejin's cases, the language was not necessarily the most difficult obstacle in making Canadian friends. Their difficulties in making Canadian friends had to do more with the chasm between Canadian white students and other ethnic students. Research shows that many students from the East have difficulty developing a viable social network with North Americans (e.g., Kanno 1996, Kim, 2000). Lee's ethnographic study of Korean international students in American universities (2001), noticed a similar

lack of social connection between the two groups. Her participants points out that their difficulties in making American friends came not only from cultural conflict or the langue barrier but also from a power relationship in favor of the majority group, American's negative attitudes toward their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the students' perceived social distance from Americans (e.g., a sense of being unaccepted as equal members). Some students were discouraged to seek relationships with Americans, or even chose to limit their friendship solely to other Korean students. The stories of Hyun and Heejin corresponded with this finding. Their feelings of being in a powerless position resulted in a type of "birds of a feather flock together" social structure, and their own cultural/social distance towards Canadian peers' individual lifestyles brought them a sense of alienation despite their initial efforts to seek friendships with Canadian peers. This validates Norton's (2000) claim that second language educational research needs to focus on the social structures in particular communities and learners' available positioning in those communities. Unless the unequal power structures and the ethnic prejudices or social distances between different cultures are unraveled and reduced, the second language learners' social struggles as well as linguistic struggles will remain in place.

It seems that my participants' perceived obstacles in making social connections with Canadians led them to seek more close friendships with individuals in other ethnic communities or Korean communities. However, their relationships with Korean communities also came with some conflicts to all of them, although the reasons for the conflicts and their reactions were different: For Hyun and Heejin, their socialization with Koreans often brought them emotional

discomfort from not practicing English, along with the heavy pressure from their academic workload. Their sense of belonging and emotional bond with the Korean community was often accompanied with conflicting desires towards English and school life. For Hyun, this conflict was resolved only when he was able to gain a certain degree of confidence in English. He once shared, "when I felt that I was not in the zone of Canadian life and its language, I felt some discomfort in associating with Koreans. It was also when I had no confidence in English. When I gained a certain confidence in English, by then, I began to feel more comfort in meeting Koreans, which became an important source of energy in my life". In the case of Heejin, the conflict is still ongoing, yet it became less significant to her as she came to have a boyfriend, who met her need of belonging at a deeper level.

For some of my participants, the reasons for difficulties in relating to the Korean community are not limited to linguistic conflicts. For Minji and Samgi, the conflicts are more about their contradictory minds towards their ethic Korean ways of social life. Minji always expressed her deep disrespect for Korean collectivistic lifestyle, describing it as an interruption to her personal life. The resistance seems to stem from the painful memory of her relationships with peers at school, and probably of the social/cultural system in which she was forced to feel much shame when she lost her father. However, in another part of her, she valued and longed for the interdependent life badly, which was revealed in her criticisms about her boyfriends' family relationships and her turmoil over the sense of loneliness. In a similar way, Samgi was critical about Korean's group-oriented and hierarchical way of living, which derived from his memories of

suppressing the cultural norms he experienced in terms of his career values and strong individuality through his relationships with classmates at high-school and at college. While he expressed resistance to authorities and interdependency in social relations, he nevertheless practiced and demanded them in his own relationship with his wife and Korean roommates. It seems to me that these participants' stories, their sense of loneliness, conflicts, and contradictory minds towards Korean collectivistic lives all witness their profound desire for "belonging". Samgi and Minji were not always self-conscious about how their deep desires had been playing out in the struggles and dilemmas of their everyday social life, but in retrospect they were able to see it to a certain degree. Their stories tell us how their move to an imagined "better place", the place of freedom and individuality, is undertaken only return to themselves and their profound longings for "belonging" deep in their hearts.

Insecurity about Future: Frozen Futurism

At the beginning of interviews with my participants, I was not really conscious about this issue of "frozen futurism" (Smith, 2006, p.25) However, as I listen to their stories and delve into their narratives, I came to realize this issue is integral to all of my participants' experiences whether it was conscious or not to them: The sense of lack in their present life, the tendency to idealize future, the projection of self into the future success, yet the feeling of preparing something that never happens, echoes in my participants' stories throughout their cross-cultural experiences. The issue was not on the conscious level when my participants were in Korea and at the beginning stage of their *uhak* lives, but later

they all sensed and expressed their regrets involved in their future-orientation in different ways.

Among my participants, Hyun was the one who was the most conscious about his own frozen futurism related to his English learning process and the pursuit of his dream. He realized the problem of means-ends inversion while studying English: the fact that he became so preoccupied with English itself (means) that he was losing the ability to communicate (ends), and the fact that, in this way, his goal of learning was being perpetually postponed. In a similar way, while pursuing his dream, he felt that he struggled to enter into a university, only to find himself struggle again in order to pass exams each semester and earn a degree. Then when he achieved what he had long dreamed of, he felt some sense of lack again, which eventually made him quest over his *degimansung* identity. Meanwhile, through the positive experience at KOSTA and his recollections, Hyun came to aware his own frozen futurism and expressed his wish to redeem his present life.

As for Samgi and Heejin, they did not express this issue directly. Yet, Samgi's new meaning negotiation, his focus shift from the future success to the present relational life implies his inner realization of the futility involved in his future-orientation. In the same vein, Heejin expressed her desire to enjoy her present school life rather than worrying about her future, which reveals her awareness of what she has lost during her perpetual pursuit or dreaming of better-tomorrow.

In Minji's case, I observe the most stubborn future-orientation throughout her cross-cultural life: She dreamed of going abroad, which, she believed, would

pave a way for happier life. When she came to Canada, what she experienced was not much of happier future, but another round of sacrificing her "now" in order to achieve another version of better future. Although later she came to be aware of what her long-seated future orientation had cost her, she still seems to be persistent in grounding herself into future success.

The emergence of future-orientation in my participants' stories seems quite natural when we consider that the issue of "indefinite future" is generally one of biggest concerns for many *uhaksaengs*, as Samgi told me in one interview. As they came to study abroad dreaming of better future through academic/ career success, it is easy to idealize future by identifying themselves with future success, which seems to make them feel more secure and real. However, as my participants stories testified, ironically enough, they found themselves continually subjected to a sense of lack and insecurity about themselves and the future. According to Loy (1994), this attested ironical effect of future-orientation is explicable as "the further our goals and purposes are projected into an indefinite future, the more inexorably our means take over their role" (p.62). He explains the cause of frozen future in terms of the problem of means-ends inversion, more precisely, the split between them, which is related to more general problems of dualistic thinking inherent in the contemporary instrumental logic:

> Usually we dualize (e.g., good vs. evil, success vs. failure) in order to affirm one term at the price of its opposite. In this case we *use* the means to *get* some ends, yet the same paradox bedevils us: the opposite are so dependent upon each other that each gains its meaning only by negating the other. A life self-consciously "good" is preoccupied with avoiding evil, my desire for success is equalled by my fear of failure, and when ends disappear into the future they reappear the only place they can…Weber characterized modernity as emphasizing the instrumental rationality at the price of more substantive rationality, yet the better way to express it is that

> instrumental rationality had become our substantive rationality: in reaction to our confusion about what to value, we have come to value instrumental rationality itself. Unfortunately, such instrumental rationality grants us no peace. Being a means, is always going somewhere, but being a means, it can never rest anywhere (p.62).

In the context of my participants' stories, I witness what Loy describes about the problems consequent to dualistic and instrumental thinking. For instance, when I look at Minji's stories, it seems that her brighter future or happiness is, from Minji's perspective, something to attainable only through her success. However, she has gotten so preoccupied with her success, which must be a means for her ends (her happiness or well-being), that she seemed to lose her ends, becoming indifferent to her end (happiness)-less life. Instead, the issue of success has come to constitute her ends. Hence the constant sense of tension and restlessness in her story.

In fact, I do not believe that the problem of means/ends split and the phenomena of frozen futurism are confined to the experiences of my participants in this project. They are prevalent in the lives of many Korean students, who grew up with the instrumental educational culture, in which especially English knowledge is idolized as a powerful means of economic and social success under the banner of the recent globalization discourse. Kim (2002), who studied English education in Korea with regards to globalization, noticed similar problems of a frozen futurism among most of the participants. She notes:

> The students in the study seemed to conceive English not just a necessary tool, but an end, which will make their dream come true… English is conceived not just as a tool for communication. Rather, English is an ultimate goal for students to achieve in school education and for their future career…Just as a great deal of demands and stress on learning English present, there seemed to be an intense level of pressure that the participants are bearing for achieving goals in English " (Kim, 2002, p. 77)

As I write this now, I am also reminded of a phrase that echoed throughout my university years: "If you invest your time in English for the next four years, your next thirty years will be comfortable". I was not really conscious of the meaning and intention behind such a future/ instrumental-oriented premise at that time, but now I think I am. Perhaps the changes in my perspective stem from the new knowledge I was exposed to during my graduate studies and this research project, as well as my reflections on the immense amount of stress and the insecure identities of the many English learners and teachers I have met during my English journey. As an example, I recall one conversation I had with a female Korean English teacher, who was on an English retraining program in Canada. After sharing her journey of English learning and teaching over her previous ten years, which were mostly about a constant sense of pressure and stress to *get* the job and *manage* the job, her concluding remark was that "without English, my life would have been much happier. I feel so small in the English world". Her words and shadowy face still remain in me and make me rethink the consequences of our frantic seeking for knowledge and a career orientation, which was just aimed at future-comfort and security based on instrumental rationality.

Returning to my participants' stories, in a similar vein, their *uhak* lives motivated mainly by "English for social mobility" and "future success" have entailed their constant fears for the failures and insecurity about futures. This, then, has brought about unexpected outcomes among some of my participants (Samgi and Heejin) as shown in their stories of future plans: They do not want to go back to Korea, where they experienced a competitive life and *hakbol* discrimination-

which frenzies the trend of frozen futurism all inevitable within the social realm. Samgi once told me that if he had to, he would rather choose the racial discrimination of Canada over the *hakbol* discrimination of Korea; Heejin's hesitance and anxiety about returning home relates to how the educational background of her boyfriend as well as her English ability will be judged. Due to these concerns, she could not anticipate any secure or better future in Korea.

Smith (2006) notes that the tendency of frozen futurism is one of the specific challenges of globalization for education today and suggest that it requires a profound deconstruction and calls for a renewed understanding and practice of living in the "Now". He asks, "Is there a way of living *Now* that could address the futility of frozen futurism while honoring the truth of human aspiration and dreaming?" (p.29). He claims that this is possible when the teaching and learning involves the practice of "truth seeking, truth discovering and truth sharing in the Now". According to Smith (2006) and Loy (2000), this inevitably involves a religious task because the problem of perpetual future-orientation has religious roots and still retains a religious character.[20] In this way, it may be no coincidence that my participants' awareness of frozen futurism and their attention shift to "now" was accompanied by a deepened spiritual life. The spiritual part of their lives will be discussed more in the next section.

[20] According to Loy (2000), a future-orientation of the West has a spiritual origin, which is traceable to the history of the Western Christian church. He explains how the West has developed its future-orientation in accordance with the Western church movement, which gradually conflated the secular and the sacred within its religious eschatology.

Spirituality and Identity Reorientation

The issue of spirituality and its role in identity de/re/construction has not been much explored in the context of cross-cultural experiences. However, my participants' narratives witness that their cross-cultural experiences have brought the religious part of life home to them. Church life or religious quest has emerged as one of the important themes in most of my participants' cross-cultural lives.

Part of the reason why the spiritual part of life appears prominently in my participants' life stories in Canada is detectable from the following words of Samgi: "As we (*uhaksaengs*) experience more difficult time here, such as loneliness and hardships in studies, we are likely to turn our attention to religious lives". The sense of loneliness and the fear of failure or of the future are the major concerns of many *uhaksaengs* and immigrants' lives. It seems that when we face these problems, which could lead us to a kind of identity disorientation, one of our reactions might be to turn our eyes to our belief or value system. This is, I believe, because at the center of our identities are our ideas of "good" and this issue of "good" inevitably involves religious character (Taylor, 1989).

For Korean international students, the influence of spirituality may be particularly strong in their cross-cultural lives, because as research shows that many Koreans engage in religious activities when they live abroad, forming their network in communities around local churches or other religious centers (Paik, 2005). This is noteworthy considering that the issue of spirituality has been a peripheral subject of research studies on Korean international students or immigrants (Rhee, 2002). Despite the growing number of religious communities and their increasing influence on the international students' or immigrants' lives,

the issue of spirituality has been disregarded and thus unheard in Western higher education. Nevertheless, the spiritual part of life seen from my participant's narratives seems to have a great influence on their understanding of self-identity in several ways.

One of these influences is that my participants' spiritual lives has become a source of self-recovery through a reconciliation with their past or through the experience of belonging. Hyun's spiritual growth in Canada helped him to reconcile with his past, his relationship with father, which led him to a gradual recovery from his long-standing *monnani* identity. Heejin also shared that she recovered a great amount of self-trust through the experience of belonging and acceptance that she experienced with church life. This aspect of spiritual influence is worthy of attention considering that many international students suffer from alienation in their cross-cultural lives (e.g., Minji) and that many of their motivations for studying abroad are imbued with the suppressing memories of the past-whether they be personal, familial, or social.

Another impact of my participant's increasing spiritual awareness in Canadian life is shown from Hyun's and Samgi's each redefined meaning of "success" and Heejin's reconstructed understanding of identity. As the individuals who grew up in a Korean *hakbol*-oriented culture, they had sought their self-worth mainly from their educational/ career success. However, the religious alignment of these participants led them each to a certain degree to see and realize their own intrinsic value, thus freeing them from competition with others or power/success seeking for their own sense of self- worth. Instead, the pursuit of learning or dream began to take a different meaning as shown from the stories of Hyun and

Heejin. Their pursuit of learning became more about the pursuit of Godliness as the ultimate/substantive value rather than the pursuit of recognition from others. This is connected to the solution to the problem of a "frozen futurism" discussed above, because the redeemed substantive values help us to overcome the tendency of means-ends split, or even to pursue the non-duality of a means-ends life.

Most of all, the powerful effect of spirituality on the identity de/re/ construction is that it could lead us to free ourselves from preoccupations with self-identity and to nurture the mutuality of human relationship. Again, my participants' stories provide empirical evidence on this point: Hyun's pursuit of "*degimansung*" identity stems from his desire to live an exemplary life for others. Heejin shared that she came to look beyond a life only for herself and to care about other people along with her deepened spiritual life. In a similar way, Samgi has become more attuned to his relational life since he became more serious about spiritual life. To add a concrete example, I also recall my own experiences of home-returns. When I struggled with my relationship with my home culture after experiencing many changes through cross-cultural experiences - which could be epitomized by my relationship with my parents- it was the spiritual resources that helped me to reestablish the connection to myself and to others. Through spiritual discipline, I was gratefully led to the deep truth of the interdependency of human life, which powerfully challenged me to get beyond my self-importance, my desire to project or assert my identity against others.

These experiences, the influences of spiritual life on our identity de/re/orientation are explicable when we consider the essence of spirituality,

which I believe is common to all religious wisdom traditions[21]. According to religious wisdom traditions, the quest for self is both prior to and beyond dualistic thinking. The binary of self and other, subject and object, joy and suffering, the ultimate and the immediate no longer make sense in the essence of their spirituality (Park, 1996). This life of non-duality is embodied in similar compassion concepts found in different religious traditions, such as "love" of Christianity, "inter-subjectivity" of Buddhism, and "humanity" of the Confucian tradition. It seems that such commonality of religious wisdom traditions, regardless of their different truth-claims, has much to offer the current identity quest tendency animated by self-interest or self- importance.

This, then, connects me to the question I posed regarding the current Western postmodern way of identity quest in the first chapter of this research. Questioning the post-modern rejection of universal principles in order to affirm and celebrate differential identities, I wondered if my participants' experiences would support this Western perspective. It seems to me that my participants' narratives are incompatible with the postmodern perspective. Their stories indicate that the appreciation and valuation of differential identities came along with their deepened spirituality, which seems to have more to do with their increasing non-dualistic thinking, rather than the Western postmodern perspective, which still contains dualistic and self- serving character (Park, 1996, Smith, 2006).

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[21] In using the term, 'religious wisdom traditions', I do not include the Western Christian tradition that has eventually become extended to the Euro-American empire. However, according to some studies (see Charry, 2004; Kim 2002, Suh, 2006), Christian tradition in the East has developed differently. Charry (2004) notes that events that shaped Western Christianity (e.g., reformation, enlightenment, modernity) never affected the Eastern Christianity. Kim (2002) and Suh (2006) claim that Korean Christianity has developed in line with its own traditions rooted in Confucianism.

Drawing on the work of Dussel, Smith (2006, p. 10) points out the poverty of postmodern perspective in the following quote:

> What moderns and post-moderns have in common…is their inability to affirm the organic unity of corporeal life as it is lived. Both therefore silence the cries of the victims: the first by ignoring them and the second by relativizing their universal claims. Modernity suffocates those cries while post-modernity prevents them from making any normative, universal claims (as cited in Alcoff & Mendiette, 2000, p.198)

In a similar vein, Smith notes in his article (1996), *Identity, Self and Other in the conduct of pedagogical action: An East/West inquiry* that the identity quest of Western identity politics is still linked to "a profound desire for identity" (p.461). Then, presenting an Eastern religious way of understanding identity, Smith explains how such Western desire for identity has made the task of self-understanding more difficult. He claims that self cannot understand itself until it loses itself in the work of relinquishment, and explains how one's deep meditation can lead one to the healthy abandonment of concepts of self and other. His works (1996, 2006) provide a valuable insight into how the spiritual essence of religious traditions can offer much to the many problems caused by the current self-focused identity quest, and how our educational conduct can be related to the practice of religious wisdom traditions. Indeed, some of my participants' stories attest to the fact that their deepened spiritual life has contributed to their sense of self-recovery and relational life. Furthermore, Minji's story also reminds me of how difficult task it is to grasp the essence of integral spirituality when it is approached with our long-habited external and objective perspective, which is also another consequence of current modern dualistic thinking. This difficulty must be related to the issues, challenges and obstacles as to why the subjects of religion and

spirituality have been dismissed in most Western secular systems of education today. Nevertheless, the overall stories of my participants suggest our (both East and West) renewed attention to religious wisdom tradition and to its potential contribution to our educational lives, which otherwise would render a constant identity crisis and desperation out of our blind worship to current globalization Market logic.

Quest for a Better-Self and Better-Future

As mentioned in the above section of Identity Formation/ Background in Korea, my four participants' studying abroad/ English could be seen as their efforts to seek "a better self and future" in terms of academic/career success. Driven by the demand of "English for social mobility" and their "imagined enchantment of the West", they all were convinced that they were leaving for the "better" when they left Korea. While their narratives of why they left Korea were entangled with different degrees of dissatisfaction toward Korea's social, educational, and cultural system, their stories were unified in their expectation that the experience of studying abroad and acquisition of English knowledge would make them and their futures become "better".

However, participants' experiences in Canada show that their linguistic/cultural hegemonic perceptions attributed a deficient identity to them in terms of their English learning process and academic studies. Also most of them have experienced constraints on their pursuit of interpersonal and intercultural belonging, which derived from the complexities and contradictions associated with their personal, social, and ethnic identities. While going through these

academic and social struggles, they also realize the futility involved in their future-orientations. Through the disillusionment of their frozen futurism and struggles involved in their cross-cultural lives, most of my participants have experienced identity re/de/construction or a discovery of new meaning. For some of them, their spiritual lives had a big influence on this process.

My participants' stories reveal that although their coming to studying abroad/English was motivated by their desire to seek " a better self and future" in terms of academic/social success, they have undergone some modification or reconstruction in terms of their ideas of "better" during their cross-cultural lives: Experience after experience, they gradually realized what more deeply matters to one's self and redefined their own "good"- what matters in life and what kind of life is meaningful (Taylor, 1989).

To elucidate this through concrete examples, let us consider the advancement of Korean men on their conventional life path, such as achieving academic/career success through competition. Initially, this was of great importance to Hyun. Yet, later his focus shifted from comparing speed that majority takes to reach a goal to accepting his own pace. Further, he realized that his educational success and achievement did not give him the sense of satisfaction that he had expected. There, he had to reexamine what meaning he was holding for his dream of success and what it really meant with regard to his self-understanding.

As for Samgi, he frantically tried to win the recognition of people through his career success, only to discover later that it lacked something that he was truly longing for. Such a realization brought him a certain change in his ideas of

success and in his social life. He began to attune to the relational life that he had casually dismissed before: He used to say that he fits into a foreign culture better because he wanted his individuality to be more valued. Yet, later he acknowledged that this focus shifted to how to get along with others.

For a long time, understanding one's identity in Heejin's world was epitomized by her parents, who tied it mainly with educational success and its implied social power, but she gradually realized that what was good for her parents would not be necessarily good for her. At the beginning of her study, she saw the meaning of her *uhak* life in her own self- worth and her own well-being, but now she says that she sees it beyond such a self-focused perspective.

As for Minji, the mastery of English knowledge and educational success in the West still takes on the same important meaning as it did for her in her Korean life. The imaginary picture of "a better future" through her educational/ career achievement in the West still preoccupies her mind. Nevertheless, she now admits that her long- seated admiration of foreign life/West and her perpetual future-orientation have had little to do with her sense of happiness and well- being.

These stories of change, their gradual identification of what more deeply matters and what contributes (or does not) to a real sense of well-being and happiness lead me back to the phrase of "a better self and future" to ponder over it. What do we mean by "a better self and future"? What does it really take when we try to better ourselves and our futures? Although the concrete way that each of my participants sought for a better identity is different, the common threads that run through the four narratives taught me that our quest for a better-identity is, after all, a task "to be realized" rather than to be sought, as Smith (1996) has put it.

issue of teacher identity from an Eastern philosophy/ religion perspective, Smith notes that "facing oneself as a teacher is a task to be realized and not sought, that is, attended to as an inherent potentiality rather than something to be obtained and validated by external certification" (p.467).

What he claims about teacher identity seems quite applicable to the stories of my participants' quest for "a better self and future". Indeed, all of my participants first believed that their educational/ career achievements would make themselves and their future better, and they sought them with all of their energy. Yet, most of their stories indicate that they did not experience a sense of "better" through external achievements such as their degrees or jobs. Rather, they seemed to experience "better selves" when they came to their own realizations or awareness, which evolved through their everyday *uhak* lives: such as Hyun's realization and acceptance of *degimansung* identity, Samgi's redefined idea of success and the realization of the value of relational life, and Heejin's awareness of her own prejudice in perceiving her identity and the realization of a frozen futurism. Indeed, their stories suggest that, as Bai (2002) writes, "only when we can see, understand, and evaluate our experiences in a better (deeper, wider, more intense, charged, comprehensive, meaningful) light, we can come to have a different sense of what we and the world are like, and we can entertain different possibilities of being" (p.9).

This doesn't mean that our external or objective achievements such as knowledge/career attainment have no place in our better self-making. I do not deny their contribution to one's better self-making. As seen from Hyun's story, Hyun's educational/ career achievements helped him to recover a great amount of

self-trust that eventually led him to *degimansung* identity. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the achievements alone never provided him with the sense of "better" that he had expected. It is perhaps as Park (1996) notes:

> The truly natural self is not to be sought as an external goal. It is not to be gained, but it is to be found within…Pedagogically, one may begin by enquiring of objective doctrines or teachings, but one cannot end with objective knowledge. Objective knowledge has its own validity only when it leads oneself to enquire within. Human whole life must be devoted to such a searching for true self. (p.21-25)

This is probably why Hyun had to enquire within himself, in our conversation, about what his job and his *degimansung* identity really meant for him. Only then did he seem experience the "better"- clear of his confusions and got more expectant about his new job and future.

If better self-making is a task to be realized, it makes us relearn about our belief about "a better future": it implies that the task of better-self making can never be a destination over there, but it is a day to day journey inherent in here and now. It is life-long practice of self-cultivation that requires our openness and attunement to "the coherence and integrity of everything that is already and everywhere at work" (Smith, 1996, p.273).

For Korean *uhaksaengs* like my participants and me, who grew up in the Korean *hakbol* and future-oriented educational culture, which privileges self-achievement over self-cultivation, it is hard to attune to and find inherent goodness in the life of the here and now. To give a concrete example, in Minji's imagination, life "over there" was always better and more real: the life in a foreign country seemed happier and people there seemed more open and fun; a future with a degree and secure job seemed more real. Instead of striving to attend good

things about the life she was given then and now, she has always devoted her energy to chase after a better future. I also found myself, more often than not, being no different from Minji. Indeed, working on this research project was a constant encounter with my hidden assumptions of "a better tomorrow": Thoughts such as "when I am finished with this project and get a degree, things will be better" creeps in me. I found myself easily susceptible to my own version of "a better future", as if the better aspect of life rests upon some change in my life conditions such as attaining another degree.

However, the conversations with Minji and other participants and the writing process helped me distill my future-orientation and challenged me to learn to live my "here and now". In this process, I personally learned that this project should take on its meaning not only in terms of a requirement for better knowledge or degree attainment, but also in terms of a requirement for "better living" in the midst of everyday present matters. What Smith (2006) notes as follows indeed resounded in me:

> If living the Way, then, is not just the end-goal of seeking, but itself a manner of being in the present, this means that the end-goal of education can never be knowledge in some independent and discrete sense, something to be accumulated for an anterior purpose such as status and other forms of social capital. Instead, the purpose of education is to learn how to live well, to be free of delusion, and to be attuned to the deepest rhythms of Life (p.39).

My participants' stories as well as mine confirm that what initially brought us to this point and to Canada was the concept of an "end-goal of education", not the original mission of education as "a way of life". We sought our "betterness" through mastering English and achieving educational/ career success in the West, which now seems to be more justified and encouraged by contemporary

globalization logic. Yet, the stories of our *uhak* life, our identity struggles and changes point out a failure to question the betterness of a life that is associated with external goals and things only, and invite us to reconsider what truly betters our lives.

Chapter 9, Implications and Conclusion

Implications

So far I have shared each participant's stories and presented an interpretative account of four narratives. Now, in this section, I consider what implications can be drawn from this study with respect to intercultural learning and identity issue of Korean *uhaksaengs*. Although I believe that many general implications have already been leaked out in the above section of synthesis, I try to elucidate more concrete implications in this space. The guiding question of this writing is what the findings of this project mean to those who are involved in English/ intercultural education as well as to the participants and me. How the narratives of this project can be related to our pedagogical action?

Understanding English/Intercultural Learning in a Broader Context

As shown in my participants' stories, Korean students' intercultural/ English learning is deeply linked with a social, cultural, and ideological practice. The participants' motivation for coming to study abroad/ English and their learning experiences in Canada show that studying abroad/ English is a social and cultural process that has a significant impact on their self-identity. This, I believe, calls for our need to pay close attention to how current Korean students are situated in specific social, historical, and cultural contexts and how their identities interplay with them. Pennycook (1999) stresses the importance of practicing critical approaches to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language) and argues that "teaching English embrace more than *teaching* and *language*, but

rather more crucial issues of education, culture and politics of our time" (p.346). Understanding intercultural/English learning in the broader context of education, culture, and ideology helps us to look at more attentively how social relationships are lived out in such educational practice and how issues of power and educational values constructs the ways students understand themselves. It is therefore necessary to develop a school curriculum in English/ intercultural education that helps us be critically conscious of social, cultural, educational contexts and issues that affect our students' lives and identities.

I believe that this need of the broader perspective on Korean students' English/intercultural learning is urgent in Korea. In current Korean society, studying abroad/English is exclusively perceived in the context of linguistic/communicative matter rather than in the contexts of ideological, historical, cultural issues. While English is viewed as a neutral medium of international communication in the globalization era, so the pursuit of studying abroad/ English is considered to be essential for academic/ career success in a competitive society, Korean students are given little opportunity to recognize a hidden face of globalization, that is, an imperialist market logic, which instills a market-oriented reality and commercialized human values into their minds. Samgi's comment gives empirical evidence on this point: While his pursuit of intercultural/ English learning was considered as legitimate and inevitable under the trend of "English for social mobility" in a Korean society, he had hardly been given an opportunity to examine and question critically what underwrite his desire and dream of wealth and status. In addition, many research studies on English education in Korea (e.g., Huh, 2004, Kim, 2002, Paik, 2005) point out that the

trend of "English for social mobility" in a Korean society has resulted in more linguistic-oriented banking education. The studies indicate that many Korean English educators and students are highly interested in gaining a high score on the English tests, but less interested in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the educational, cultural, ideological issues related to their pursuit of English/ intercultural learning. Perhaps, the indifference to such issues reflects an unfortunate consequence of instrumental rationality embedded in our educational culture, which eventually has led us to be stuck in thinking only one way- *technically*, while making us feel useless or impotent to think differently.

This tendency seems to be not so much different in the Western context when I reflect on the participants' experiences in Canada. Although, in current sociocultural and critical pedagogy literature (e.g., Kubota, 2004; Morgan, 2004; Norton and Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999), there has been an effort to understand language and learning in relation to the relationships between learners and their sociocultural contexts, it was hardly attested to in my participants' school experiences. Their collective stories indicate that what they perceived and experienced in Canadian ESL or university programs did not scratch where their lives itched- their identity struggles, the desire for belonging, and the power relations- the place where social, cultural, and ideological values and relationships were lived out.

Apple (1990) note that any theories and practices involved in education are not just technical, but inherently ethical and political. Norton and Toohey (2004) also claims that "language is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the

way language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future" (p.1). Therefore, it should be pointed out again that school curriculum for Korean students of English and intercultural education needs to connect the students' educational practices to more essential and critical issues of power, culture, history, and values in our society. In this way, "the teaching of English can be reconceptualized as a pedagogy that opens op possibilities for students and teachers of English ...in terms of the way they perceive themselves, their role in society, and the potential for change in their society" (Norton, 1989, p.402-403). This process of reconceptualization further requires an important task of developing critical consciousness on unexamined assumptions or beliefs behind our English/intercultural education practice. This is discussed more in the following section.

Deconstructing Dominant Education Discourses

My participants' stories of why they came to study abroad/English and their learning experiences in Canada show how exclusively their self-understandings or their perceptions of identity were grounded on their educational/career achievements. Especially English related achievement, because of the power English takes up as a language of capitalism in current globalized society, was believed to be a way of making "a better self and future". The participants' pursuit of studying abroad/English was also encouraged by the idea of "better West", one nurtured in their surroundings. These stories invite teachers and students of intercultural/ English education to be aware of how educational

and ideological distortions in our society have tacitly contributed to deform us in terms of our worldviews, our perspectives on education and our self-understandings.

Then the stories also invites us to re-think and act against the increasing technicization and commercialization of educational practice, which has become more rampant by market logic, the central logic of contemporary globalization (Smith, 2006). There needs to be educational efforts to reflect on how the consequences of market logic, such as the severance of knowledge and being, matter and spirit, self and others have become the very source of despair and identity disorientations of many students during their educational pursuits. As shown in the narratives of my participants, educational credentials or achievements alone could never be certification of our better self-making, nor could they primarily keep us out of our insatiable desire for "a better tomorrow". We need to challenge the naïve optimism inherent in market logic that make us sets a goal for external certifications or credentials and then goes after them with gusto, expecting the result to be a good life and future. Indeed, as Bai (2002) claims, "the most stubborn dogmatism that plagues us is naive realism: the view that what we perceive is what is "out there," objectively" (p.15). The narratives of this study suggest that we should break out of the naïve realism and give a refreshing negation to the seductive assumption of market logic swirling around our educational practice. In current Korean society, whereas English knowledge is considered as a gateway to the position of power and economic prestige, we fail to question how the perspective itself reflects an education trend besieged by the global force of consumerism in our time. Thus, it is an urgent task that school

develops a new pedagogical approach that critically investigates and challenges the market driven educational practices.

When we critically examine the dominant discourse of market logic embedded in our educational practices, it is also important to realize how Korean students' studying abroad/ English practices are connected to an ideological process that has rendered cultural and linguistic inequalities between Korean society and the West. As Pennycook (1994) argues, we need to look at "how English is connected to social and economic inequities between countries and how it is bound up with various forms of culture and knowledge that are increasing dominant in the world" (p.24). Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) critically points out that English as the "world language" is symptomatic of the globalization process that promotes Americanization and the homogenization of world cultures. The process is fostered by cultural products (such as films, pop culture) from the English speaking countries, particularly the U.S. The narratives of this study prove this point: through English language, its cultural and ideological media products, they all nurtured deep admiration for the West, considering its values and culture superior to those of Korea.

Therefore, for those who involved in English/intercultural education for Korean students, it is first and foremost necessary to examine how hegemonic power of English as well as current globalization logic has contributed to construction of a prejudiced cultural and social consciousness and value system among themselves and their students.

Then it will be also important for them to work on envisioning different possibilities of reality. One of such efforts may include recovering cultural

equality between Korea and the West by re-interpreting their cultural differences: Educators might identify the fact that differences between the two cultures and languages often reflect differences in terms of their social, political and history conditions; differences do not confer any superior statues on one culture/language over the other. In fact, they are the very condition that sustains each other's identity since "identity is always constituted through the scaffolding of others" (Smith, 2006, p.31). Smith (2006) points out the reciprocal relation of the Western-Eastern identity and the importance of its recognition in this age of globalization:

> The very identity of "the West" is dependent for its construction on a vast history of relations with "the East"; indeed there is no West without an East, and vice versa; and the most fundamental requirement of a global age is a recognition of this fact so that a real conversation can begin about the necessary conditions of mutuality that will inevitably form part of all human futures (p.36).

Related to this perspective, educators may continue to deconstruct the dualistic conceptual order inherent in current dominant education discourse, such as knowing/being, self/other, subject/object, etc., and help students recognize how those seemingly different concepts are in fact interdependent and thus, one in a deep sense.

Deconstructing the dualistic constructs and recognizing the mutual conditions of human life and cultures can also contribute to developing an authentic cross-cultural perspective among the students. When students look at cultural difference from a superficial and single cultural perspective, they are likely to judge different cultural behaviors or values as incorrect or unworthy. (For instance, Minji judged the Western individualistic family relationships as

incorrect from her single Korean perspective). According to Britzman (1995), the binary or dualistic concepts stems from privileging one side over the other by denying, rejecting, and silencing the other. He also continues that the constituents of identity and knowledge, formed by such binary opposites, are seemingly contradictory to each other when in fact one is "built" into the other. Therefore, prior to judging whether a certain target culture is right or wrong, students need to be encouraged to understand cultural differences with deeper insights and to comprehend heuristically how seemingly contradictory concepts and cultures stems from an exclusive or single perspective. In this account, I suggest that English/intercultural educators encourage their students to discover variegated, contradictory, and deconstructed creative identities, while keeping themselves from reproducing conformed, indifferent, and self-focused identities anymore.

Studying Abroad/English as a Journey for Self-Reconstruction and Agency-Enhancement

Most of my participants' stories show that their intercultural/English learning process was a large part of self-reconstruction or transformation process in that their self-understandings and world-views were deconstructed and reshaped during their *uhak* lives. The participants shared that their self-understanding, relationships, and values have been challenged or changed as they came to gradually identify what is of most importance to them and what more deeply contributes to their sense of wellness and happiness. These stories of change imply that studying abroad/ English practice can contribute not just to students' educational achievement but also to their identity-reconstruction or

transformation. In this light, I suggest that curriculum development for Korean overseas students need to consider the ways to encourage their journey of self-reconstruction.

As the participants' stories and my own experience shared, the journey of studying abroad/English usually accompanies the experience of being uncertain, confused, and insecure in understanding of self in relation to others and to the larger society. However, the troubling experiences and the identity disorientation may offer a meaningful opportunity of discovering a deeper understanding of ourselves and our own life-world. Indeed, as a theologian MacDonald (1985) notes, "everything difficult indicates something more our theory of life yet embrace". Then the journey of revisiting our theory of life can be encouraged during this intercultural learning. The journey of revisiting the theory of life, first of all, requires us to review unexamined assumptions and beliefs behind the dominant educational discourse as mentioned above. The task then further invites us to reflect not just on structural and ideological practices of our educational culture, but also deeply on how our relationships to or understanding of the people and things have been conditioned or distorted by them, because our self-understandings are constantly molded by, and mold, our relationships with others. By seeing what was subvisible or invisible before, reconfiguring the subtle body of reality in our relationships, and re-evaluating the values assigned to things, we may learn to re-interpret our experience and life-world, thus bringing forth an experience of self-reconstruction or transformation. This individual action – I call it "action" since breaking through our natural world and being conscious of our living contexts is a "cognitive action" (Green, 2001, p.310) - may also be

inseparable from enhancing our agency. Because it helps increasing an individual's capacity to think for oneself and to make ethical decisions founded in the personal awareness and knowledge, resisting the imposition of the dominating ideas and reality.

Then how do we enact for education this process of self-reconstruction and agency enhancement? If there are some practical resources we can take up to encourage the process, this research project taught me that "conversations" could be one useful tool. Throughout this research project, I learned how telling stories about our experiences and fusing them with other stories bring our awareness to another level of depth, helping us become aware of the meanings and significance of our experiences. Bai (2002) notes this power of dialogical nature in conversations:

> Through dialogue, we turn information into personal knowledge... Dialogue has the form of a "combat" albeit amicable as between friends, in which interlocutors compel each other to examine critically, with utmost rigor, their thoughts, perceptions, and the impressions for self-contradiction and superficiality, confusion and deception" (p.6).

My participants' feedbacks on our overall conversations attest to this point: For example, Hyun told me that he was able to know and clarify better his ambivalent thoughts and confusions through our conversations. Minji told me that "Since I had these conversations with you, I have come to think a lot about life. What is it all about? I have also come to wonder seriously what makes others go on with their lives." I suggest dialogue as a useful practice towards self-reconstruction and agency-enhancement, as the critical self-awareness and self-knowledge is an essential part of the construction of new meaning that challenges the existing reality of world.

The narratives of the participants and my own experience also point out that spiritual/religious wisdom traditions could be also a powerful resource for the journey of self-reconstruction and agency-enhancement. The inspirations we can garner from spiritual traditions would help us not only to re-interpret our thoughts and constructs that had been caged up in the dominant market-driven educational culture, but also to give us strength to learn/live more wholly against its various forces. Smith (2002b) notes:

> We need new or renewed spirituality that can give us the strength to live more creatively and freely in a culture of strong persuasions. It is not enough to moan about consumerism or the 'technological' revolution. In order not to die of consumption, you need a positive alternative that is stronger. Where can this come from? There is only one true source of spiritual strength, and that is a daily discipline of prayer and meditation (p.168).

Indeed, in the face of increasing technicization of teaching and learning, the contemplative consciousness nurtured by spiritual traditions seems a powerful way to overcome our impoverished inner life and to find our identity in a new way- in the way that we try to better our lives not just by our future achievements, but also by our everyday self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-losing, which may eventually lead us to a paradoxical truth of losing and finding. Without negating other aims, the aims of knowledge mastery or educational achievements, religious wisdom traditions insist that still the primary and fundamental goal of learning and education is the Way of life as a whole. Not only is this a most basic aim but also a most urgent one in these times of educational trend driven by the dualistic instrumentalism and market logic. From this perspective, I suggest that there needs to be educational efforts to encourage teachers and students to review and reevaluate their own spiritual/religious cultural heritages with a renewed

perspective. For an exemplary model of such educational efforts, Kim (2006) explores how the Eastern Confucian values can provide an educational vision alternative to market-initiative education. Also, Smith (2006) notes about a course titled "Teaching as the practice of Wisdom" (p.57). It is refreshing and heartening to hear this kind of efforts to integrate education and spiritual wisdom traditions. Surely, if individuals' studying abroad/ English experience could be connected to the renewed understanding and practice of wisdom traditions, its contribution to their self-reconstruction and agency enhancement would be a lot, as shown from the narratives.

Lastly, I would like conclude this section with some questions that have evolved from this study and a few suggestions for further study as well. While trying to shed light on the identity issues of Korean students in relation to their cross-cultural experiences, this process has raised many more questions: for examples, how does English as a global language makes an impact on socio-economic class division of Korean society? How should Korean educational practice, especially EFL pedagogy make sense of globalization in a way that honors its own cultural/linguistic identity while coping with sweeping effects of "English fever" in its educational contexts? How does the practice of ESL pedagogy and West higher education contribute to, and shaped by the power relations of globalization? What are the challenges and possibilities for integrating wisdom traditions into the current market-based ESL/higher education system? These may be just a few questions that require critical considerations and examinations of those who are involved in English/ intercultural education for Korean learners.

Further studies are called for to investigate the intercultural experiences and identity issues of Korean students in different settings. While this study focused on the Korean adult students who pursue university education in Canada, due to the increasing demand of English and educational competition, a new wave of *jogiuhak* (early study abroad) is increasing among Korean elementary and secondary school students in Korea. A study to examine the experiences of those who study abroad at the early ages of elementary or secondary schools and the issues significant to their cross-cultural adjustments and identity would be fruitful to develop further understanding of Korean overseas students as well as the sociopolitical and educational implications of the *jogiuhak* trend in Korea. Also, as the case of Heejin in this study, many of Korean *uhaksaengs* are going back to their home country after a long-term study in the Western educational institutes. It would be interesting to investigate their subsequent reentry experiences and identity negotiations in Korea. Also, how an increasing number of Korean *uhaksaeng* returnees and their sojourn experiences affect the dominant educational discourse in current Korea would be another interesting subject to be studied.

Closing

This study began as a long journey to explore the experiences of Korean *uhaksaengs* in regards to the relationship between their studying abroad experiences and identity change. Coming to this stage of research, I once again look back on the very first chapter of this research project, my autobiographical reflection and research questions. I began this research project with many questions, not exactly knowing what direction those questions would take me to,

but hoping to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues and questions that triggered this research. It seems that I went into this project, expecting to find certain things, but came out with many other which have indeed enriched my perspectives on identity issues of Korean *uhaksaengs*.

One such finding that broadened my way of thinking about identity issue of Korean *uhaksaengs* is the current force of globalization market logic and its profound impacts on Korean students' identity construction. As shown in my autobiographical reflection, there were deeply disturbing feelings and questions evoked in me whenever I observed the identity struggles and practices of many Korean overseas students. It seems that many cross-cultural research studies (e.g., Boyd, 2000; Lee, 2001, Luzio-Lockett, 1996) look at international students' identity struggles with a primary focus on the cultural/linguistic difference between their home country and the host country, and their difficulty in living within them. Through my cross-cultural experiences, however, I have learned that the dichotomous cultural boundary could be superficial (Kramsch, 1993) and that there could be a more fundamental issue of 'value system' behind this cultural agenda. I came to discover that, as Kramsch (1993) notes, "in fact, the feelings of being on the fence or the boundary of different cultures are only a particularly dramatic manifestation of social ruptures that have always existed within seemingly homogeneous families and other social and ethnic groups, as soon as an individual cross the lines of race, social class" (p.234). Indeed, through my experiences with fellow Korean overseas students, I felt that many Korean students' identity struggles have something to do with some kind of this "social ruptures" that Korea has already gone through and their influence on current

educational value system, but I could not exactly identify what they were and where they came from. However, this research project helped me to realize how slippery and rhetoric practices of globalization leak in our stories of cross-cultural lives and how our identity understandings and practices are affected by the social ruptures caused by contemporary globalization market logic. In this light, this research project helped me to identify and probe over the foundational issue that has shaped my research questions.

Another enriching experience I had throughout this research project lies in a more practical realm: The stories, thoughts, interpretative accounts that I worked on during this project began to visit my real life-world and led me to question and rethink the assumptions of what I believe, practice, dream and act for or against in my everyday life. I think it was this meaningful experience in which I saw the real beauty of this research project, which in turn eventually assisted me to come to this point. Personally, I went through some big life changes during this project: My status as an international student in Canada changed into a permanent resident of the country; I became a mother by giving birth to my son in the middle of this project. In the face of my newly received resident card, I remember having an unexpected critical dialogue with myself: What is the meaning of this status change? How should I comprehend this change, the benefits and privileges that may have come about through the alignment with th· ·ommodified global multiculturalism? Without my participants' stories and the process of writing an interpretive account of the stories, I wonder if I would have given such thought to those questions. In addition, the participants' stories and writing process helped me to treasure my everyday life, valuing my new role

of mother as best as I could by guarding myself away from the stresses and pressures coming from the usual dualistic thinking around me such as me-family, study-housework, and now-tomorrow. In this process, the interpretative account of this study has become a mirror that safeguarded my thoughts and actions in my ordinary life. I remember Hyun once telling me after reading his narratives, "Before, I thought that research is the thing that investigates some extraordinary phenomena or stories only. But now that I read my stories, I see that such an ordinary story of mine could be a research subject. That is quite impressive!" In a similar vein, during this research, it was impressive for me to experience how the research made of our shared ordinary stories bounce back to my life and serve my "here and now", resonating with a major theme suggested by the findings of this study.

Over almost two years of our interviews, I am still in contact with the four participants in this study. Their cross-cultural learning/ livings still go on, making the narratives of this project completely incomplete ones. The last time I met Hyun, he filled me with the stories of challenges and joys involved in creating new home in another city. Samgi now works as a professional cook in Vancouver. Accepting his wife's wish to remain as a housekeeper, he now works hard to immigrate into Canada through his own career. Heejin, finally finishing her study last winter, has been unable to make up her mind whether to return to Korea or not for a while. However, the last time I saw her, she told me about her final decision to go back to Korea and shared many mixed feelings and thoughts about her home-return. Minji is now already in the second year of her undergraduate program. She still thrives to achieve her brighter future, although her stories of

loneliness remain same. I can never tell how these everyday life stories, decisions, experiences and relationships will change the narratives of our cross-cultural lives in the future. Some may go back to Korea. Some may remain here. Either way, our stories of change through intercultural experience greatly influence us and others as well. My wish is that, whether we are in Korea or in Canada, our stories of cross-cultural lives and change would help us and others to go on and discover our life-world as a true abiding place - the place in which we see our desire for self no longer making sense, so that our true "better self" can be surprisingly found, and so that even if we never seek it we also never stop experiencing it.

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An Introduction to the Ministry of National Defense. From http://www.mnd.go.kr/

Appendix A. Information Letter

Dear_____

I am a doctoral student in the secondary education program at the University of Alberta. I would like to invite you to be part of my research project. The purpose of my research is to understand complexities and dynamics involved in Korean second language learners' intercultural and interlinguistic experience and identity (re)construction process. This study will examine major characteristics of intercultural/interlinguistic experience of Korean overseas students and how their identities have been (re)constructed and transformed across cultural/linguistic settings and over time. Also, this study will explore personal, socio-cultural, historical, religious factors associated with their understanding and practice of identities before and during their cross-cultural learning.

Your participation would involve agreeing to a series of four interviews of approximately two hours duration conducted over a four-month research period. The questioning procedures throughout the interview will attempt to exchange stories and thoughts related to your intercultural/interlinguistic experiences and how they have influenced your identity construction process. The interviews will be audio-taped for future reference and the tapes will be summarized. The summary of each conversation will be provided to you for your approval and reflection after each interview. Your confidentiality will be assured and your anonymity will be protected by the use of pseudonym within the thesis. No one else except the interviewer and supervisory committee will have access to the interview tapes without your prior consent and any use of data will be handled in compliance with the U of A Standards.

Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time at your discretion. If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of my research, please contact me.

Sincerely,
Jeong-sun Lee.

Contact Information:
Jeong-sun Lee
Telephone: (780)988-2749 or (604) 432-7625. Email: jeongsunlee@hotmail.com

OR
Dr. Olenka Bilash
Telephone: (780) 492-5101. Email: olenka.bilash@ualberta.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at (780)492-3751

Appendix B. Consent Form

I _____, hereby agree to participate in the research conducted by Jeong-sun Lee according to the conditions outlined in the information letter. I am aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project. I also fully understand that I may withdraw from this project at any time and that my confidentiality is assured.

Signature_____

Date_____

For further information concerning the completion of the form, please contact:

Jeong-sun Lee
Telephone: (780)988-2749 or (604) 432-7625
Email: jeongsunlee@hotmail.com
OR
Dr. Olenka Bilash
Email: olenka.bilash@ualberta.ca
Telephone: (780) 492-5101

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